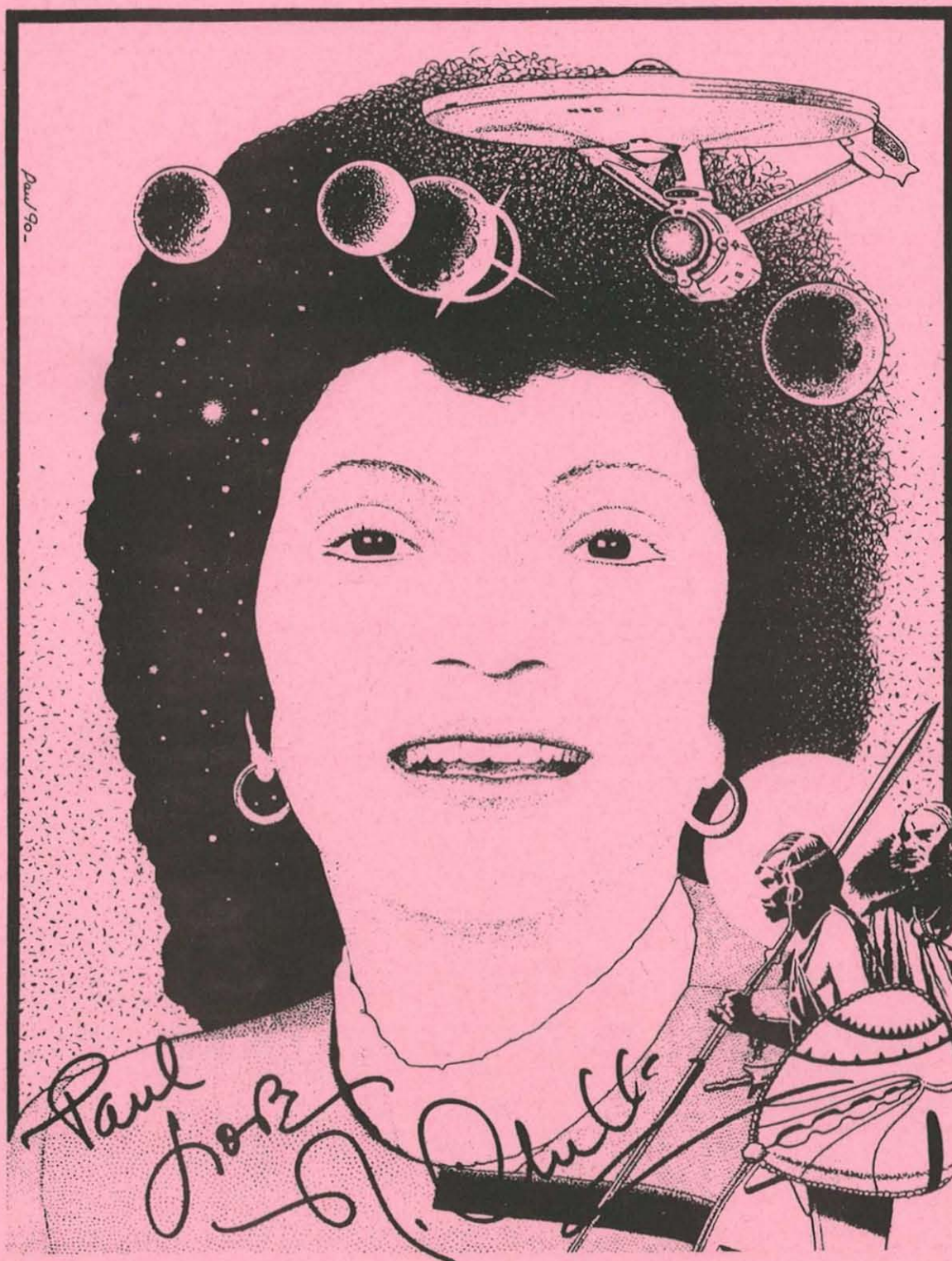


IOIC

IOIC
LOG

5



a
Star Trek
fanzine

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Rec-26



ON LEAVING GAMMA HYDRA 4

or, AFTER 'THE DEADLY YEARS'

by

Teresa Abbott

"I am quite ready now, Doctor."

Spock said the words with feeling. And indeed, he was quite ready, and desperate to get off the bridge with its confusing, conflicting emotional messages.

The Captain and the Doctor were both smiling and happy, acting as if nothing had happened. How could they dismiss so readily all that had taken place over the last few days?

Slowly and painfully, Spock joined McCoy and Commodore Stocker in the turbolift. Even in that small, claustrophobic space it was so very, very cold.

He was unhappily aware that Kirk did not accompany them, preferring to remain with the woman on the bridge. And why would he not? She had, after all, stood by him throughout the whole affair, whereas Spock... The weight of his years seemed to crush Spock like a physical force. Even worse was the knowledge of what he had done.

Realising that the turbolift was passing the level on which his quarters were situated, he reached out and activated the stop mechanism.

McCoy and Stocker broke off the lighthearted small-talk they had been indulging in, and looked at him questioningly.

"What're you doing, Spock? You're supposed to be going with me to sickbay." McCoy was only mildly curious, absorbed as he was in the joy of his own recovered youth.

The Vulcan forced the voice from his throat with difficulty. "There is a small matter I must attend to in my quarters. I will not be long." He daren't say more without telling a direct lie. The need to be alone, to think things through, was not one he would readily admit to.

The Doctor grunted disapprovingly. "Well, make sure you're not. The longer you wait, the greater the reaction to the serum will be."

He had returned to his conversation with Stocker even before the lift doors had closed behind the Vulcan.

The corridor seemed endless, but Spock finally made it to the refuge of his quarters. The temperature inside helped to ease the aching in his limbs, but nothing could warm the icy chill around his heart.

Heart? At one time he would have denied that he had one, at least in the way that Humans meant the word. Now he only knew that this non-existent heart of his was breaking.

With fumbling fingers he raised the temperature control even higher, then lowered himself slowly into his chair, leaning back and closing his eyes. All the mental disciplines he tried to summon were unable to stop the flood of unwanted memories pouring into his mind.

He would have given his life to protect Kirk from harm, and yet in his friend's hour of need he had failed him.

"Traitorous, disloyal. You stab me in the back..."

Kirk's words reverberated over and over, and they were terribly true. It would have been bad enough just to watch the hearing at which Kirk had been humiliated, mocked at, destroyed. Spock had done far worse than watch. He had led the whole sorry spectacle.

There was no excuse for what he had done. The responsibility for the hearing had been his and his alone. He had stated it, publicly, in front of everyone. But how difficult it had been to look Kirk in the eyes!

"Spock, I would never have believed it of you."

He didn't believe it of himself.

As a consequence, he had accepted that their friendship would suffer. He had expected maybe a reprimand. Anger. Discussion. He had never expected total rejection.

Kirk's final words to him burned in his brain. *"Get out. I never want to have to look at you again."*

Stop it! his logical Vulcan half whispered deep inside him. *What you did was necessary and unavoidable in the circumstances. Jim will know and understand that.*

Spock was far too tired to listen to logic. A way around the hearing could have, and should have, been found. The fact that he had been too cold, too tired, too slow and just too old to find one was no excuse. Now he would have to pay the penalty.

He no longer felt any desire to go to the sickbay. It had taken all of his strength to make it to his room, and he had no wish to leave the Vulcan warmth for the bitter outside. No-one had believed how the cold sapped his defences and his control. Even now he knew his vision was growing ever more dim, and his thoughts slow and confused and progressively more illogical.

And what point was there in going? All that awaited him there was the painful process back to the youth he had once valued, but which would now stretch before him, an endless agony of empty days without the friendship of those he loved.

Yes. *Loved.*

With the weight of years upon him, it no longer seemed to matter to admit to that word.

Without fully understanding what he did, he rose from his chair

and activated the door release leading through to Kirk's cabin. A few faltering steps and he was inside, the familiar surroundings a balm to his troubled thoughts. He sat at the desk, and rested his head on his arms on the table top. Memories of the hours he had spent there with Jim soothed him, temporarily lessening his hurt. Finally, overcome with fatigue, he slept.

In his confusion, he had forgotten that the temperature of Kirk's cabin was substantially below that of his own.

Dr. Janet Wallace left the bridge shortly after the others. Kirk watched her go with mixed feelings. He knew he was still attracted to her, but knew also that there would never be anything more than friendship between them.

She alone, out of all his friends, seemed to have preferred him old to the way he was now!

He himself was overjoyed to have his health again. The whole experience had affected him more than he would care to admit. He would need to run over it in his mind later on, but would not show his feelings in front of the bridge crew.

And it was a pleasure to sit in the command chair, with no aches and pains and a clear mind. One never appreciated what one had until it was nearly lost. Doubtless Spock, too, would be glad to return to normal.

Kirk's conscience troubled him when he thought of his Vulcan friend. He knew now that Spock had acted in the only logical way open to him. Instead of supporting his First Officer and recognising his motives, Kirk had fought him all the way, even accusing Spock of wanting command. Now he was deeply ashamed of the things he had said. He couldn't remember exactly what had passed between them, but he hoped he hadn't unintentionally hurt the Vulcan. He retained a vague, disquieting memory of Spock turning away from him, looking defeated and sad. Surely Spock would realise that it was only the effects of the disease that had made Kirk act like that.

Kirk pressed the intercom, impatient to speak to Spock and make sure there was no remaining misunderstanding between them.

"Sickbay. How's it going, Bones? Is Spock ready to leave there yet?"

There was a moment's silence before McCoy answered, his voice slightly embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Jim. Spock hasn't been here. He had a small matter to attend to, and I guess I just forgot the passing of time."

Unexplained, a chill crept up Kirk's back. "I'll have him paged for you, Doctor."

Kirk listened as Uhura put a call through to Spock's quarters without result. A shipwide broadcast was similarly ineffective.

By now McCoy had joined Kirk on the bridge. "Jim, I'm sorry. I've got no excuse for letting him go. He seemed quite all right - allowing for his condition - and I took him at his word that he wouldn't be long."

Kirk was tight-lipped, openly worried now. "Uhura, instigate a shipwide search for Mr. Spock. Notify me as soon as you find anything. I'll be in my quarters." He left the bridge with a worried McCoy behind him.

In the turbolift, he could not meet McCoy's eyes. "Bones, while we were affected by the disease, I said things to Spock that he may have taken badly. If anything has happened to him, I'll never forgive myself."

The Doctor was also uncomfortable. "I guess none of us treated him fairly. He's as infected as the rest of us were, but because he doesn't show the symptoms as much, we all tended to dismiss them as unimportant. He asked for my help and I sneered at him, and didn't even give him my understanding. And I guess we all blamed him for conducting the hearing, even although it was Stocker who ordered him to hold it."

Kirk's face was grim. "Stocker. Of course. I should have known that Spock would never have done that of his own volition. Once the regulations were quoted to him, he would have had no option."

They left the turbolift in silence, and headed along the corridor. As the door to his quarters slid open, Kirk pulled up short and gave a sigh of relief.

"Spock! Thank heavens! He must have come in here to see me and fell asleep."

But McCoy had already crossed to the desk, a worried frown on his face and his scanner whirring. His voice was grim.

"Call sickbay, Jim. I need a gurney."

"Why? What's the matter?" Kirk forced the words past the sudden knot in his stomach. He was crossing to the intercom as he spoke and urgently passed on McCoy's message. "Bones? He's just asleep, isn't he?"

McCoy straightened up from bending over the silent form. "He's alive, but only just. His temperature's way below normal for a Vulcan, and all his body processes are extremely low. I won't be able to give him a dose of the serum while he's in this condition as the pain of the transition would kill him for sure. I'll have to get him to sickbay, warm him up and hope he'll get stronger before he dies of old age." He caught the stricken look on Kirk's face. "I'm sorry, Jim."

"I'm the one who should be sorry."

Kirk stepped back helplessly as the orderlies came in and bundled the silent form away. Again he had made the mistake of thinking of the Vulcan as invincible and invulnerable, and he, above all others, should have known that Spock was not.

Grim-faced, he followed the stretcher to sickbay.

Spock woke up reluctantly, unwilling to return to the cold and lonely world he last remembered. Gradually he became aware that he was at least warm, and in some sort of bed. Sickbay, then, with no

memory of getting there. Opening his eyes, he saw Kirk sitting in the chair beside him, and turned away in sudden anguish.

"Spock, don't." Kirk's voice was urgent, with no hint of hatred in it. "Please don't turn away. I understand what you did and why you did it. I'm sorry for taking out all my anger on you. I didn't mean the things I said, and I apologise."


Spock's throat was tight. He couldn't bring himself to speak, or believe what Kirk was saying.

McCoy came bustling into the room and started hovering around the bed. "Well, that's much better. The life indicators are all much stronger. I think I can give you that shot now, Spock, when you feel ready. Jim, I think you had better leave the room. There could be quite a violent reaction."

"I'm staying." There was no arguing with the determination in Kirk's voice.

The words penetrated through to Spock's subconscious, and slowly the Vulcan began to wonder if perhaps he had misjudged the situation. Maybe, if he had his strength back again, and the speed of his thoughts, there might be a way to talk things through and come to terms with all that had happened. Slowly he turned his head towards McCoy, and as he caught sight of the worry on Kirk's face, the icy dread around his heart finally melted.

"I am ready now, Doctor." He said the words with feeling, and this time he meant them. It seemed that everything was, after all, going to be all right.



THE DOVE

They call me the Great Bird
when all I want to be is a dove.
I want to show the world
that indeed peace is the way.

I created a fairy tale
and taught that the good always win.
A silver starship travels unknown voids
Seeking wonder - finding peace.

The philosophy I called IDIC
and it has followers all over the world.
They are people believing in peace
and in the equal rights of all.

In a thousand years
my name may be forgotten.
But the idea will live forever,
and maybe the dove can find eternal rest.



Bettina Rackel

LIVE LONG AND PROSPER

by

Marie Chettle

"Live long and prosper," he said.

How can I, without him? My friend. My brother. My T'hy'la. How can I, when half of me is missing? The strong, calm, logical half.

Bones, who never showed his true feelings for him until the funeral, says I must talk about it, to come to terms with what's happened. I can't come to terms with it - not when, deep in my heart, there's something I want.

I want what Fate has taken from me. I want what I know I can never have.

I want him back.

Now, by some miracle, my prayers have been answered, my dreams have come true. *I have him back!* Not wholly - yet - but soon. When he said, "Jim. Your name is Jim," I could have screamed and shouted, laughed and cried. I wanted to hug him and shout praise to every God I could think of, but I knew that would embarrass him - now more than ever, in his bewildered state. He wasn't sure who we were, or even who he was, but he will know - in time. So all I could do was say 'Yes,' before the others crowded around him.

He didn't call any of *them* by name; in fact, he didn't talk at all. All he did was gaze around at the smiling faces, staring at each of them in turn. He stared at Bones the longest (except for me); I thought he was going to say something to him, but he didn't.

Then Sarek came up and said that the Priests were waiting for him. He went with them, turning only once to look back at us. I asked Sarek why he had to go. I was barely able to control my temper as I spoke. I'd only just got him back and already they were taking him away from me again!

"He isn't himself," came the reply, "but he will be in time." We could see him later, Sarek said, but at the moment he needed help in remembering how to control his emotions, and the Priests would be best at that. We could help him later, when he started to remember more. Sarek looked at me as he said that. He then invited us to stay at his house.

He's progressing superbly, remembering more each day. It took him two days to come to terms with his emotions. After that we could visit him, and we do, as much as possible. I go every day.

His room is a little stone cell, very much like that of the monks in the old monasteries on Earth. He only has one chair, so I

normally sit on the bed. We discuss anything new he has remembered, and then we play chess.

On a few occasions he has not wanted to see me.

It upset me the first time; I thought the Priests were trying to stop me from seeing him. I started to shout, demanding to see him. Finally a High Priest had to come down and tell me that he had ordered them not to let me in. I asked why; they didn't know. I left.

I was still shocked when I reached the house. I spent most of the day in my room. I thought it must have been something I'd done, but I couldn't think what. Bones tried to reassure me, but it didn't help.

The next day I went as usual, half expecting to be turned away again, but I wasn't. When I sat down on his bed, I asked him why he hadn't wanted to see me. It was a great relief when he said he had wanted to be alone to think and to meditate. My relief must have shown, because a little sadness crept into his eyes, and he said that he was sorry if I thought it was my fault, that I had done something wrong. I told him it was all right if he wanted to be alone, now or in the future. We then started our usual discussion.

Not long after that I was wakened in the middle of the night, and was told that he wanted to see me. When I arrived at his room, I found him barely able to keep his emotions under control. I asked him what was wrong.

He said that he could remember killing me.

He knew he hadn't actually killed me, but he also knew that he thought he had at the time. Why? Why would he want to do something like that? I was his friend!

I knew he was taking about the first time I had visited Vulcan, when he had been suffering from the Pon Farr. I managed to get him to sit down before explaining what had happened. I told him it wasn't his fault that he had tried to kill me. He wasn't convinced, at least not wholly, and I knew he wouldn't be until he remembered exactly what had happened - but he would remember.

He has now returned to Sarek's house. He has been here for a few days, but something was still not right - something between him and Bones. I didn't know what it was, but I was determined to find out.

Then earlier today I heard voices arguing in the living room. Opening the door quietly, I saw them both standing in the middle of the room.

"But why me?" Bones was asking. "You must admit I was not the best choice for a mind meld."

"You were the only one available, therefore you were the logical choice," came the reply. "I will admit to having preferred a more logical and ordered mind, but as it was I had to settle for second best."

"Second best?!"

"You are insulted?"

"You're damn right I'm insulted!" snapped Bones.

"Doctor, I am just repeating what you said." I knew by this time that he had heard me opening the door.

"I didn't say I was 'second best'!"

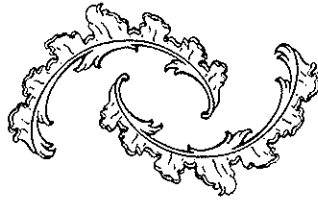
"No, you said you were not the best choice; therefore, if you are not the best choice, you must be the second best... possibly even the third."

I couldn't contain my laughter any longer. They had solved the problem that had been between them. Entering the room, I crossed to them and patted them lightly on the back.

"Everything's back to normal," I said.

And everything was back to normal. I had my T'hy'la back and we were going to do, together, what he had told me to do.

We were going to live long, and prosper.



RETURN

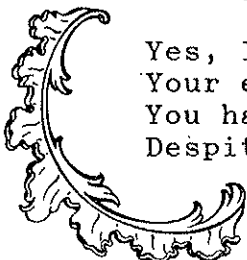
A quiet voice coldly calls,
The loveless Vulcan hears.
Another voice within him says,
What of the Human years?

The Enterprise enfolds him,
Emotion trembles near.
He gathers all the cold of space
To make it disappear.

Oh so cold and so withdrawn
Where is my brother-friend?
Kolinahr was not enough,
But the Vulcan will not bend.

I have missed you, brother-friend,
My joy is very real,
And I can wait for the moment when
Into your heart I'll steal.

Yes, I can wait a little while;
Your eyes give you away.
You have returned to me at last,
Despite that cold display.



Carolynn Taylor

A REASON TO SMILE

by

Gill Cheseldine

"Approaching Neutral Zone, Commander."

"Engage Cloaking Device." Ankh-Hotepf, Commander of the Romulan flagship, 'Roma's Finest', gave the order with a steadiness of voice that betrayed none of his inner trepidation.

"Engaged, sir."

"Lay in course for the Earth outposts."

"Course laid in, sir."

Hotepf turned away from the crowded instrument panel, rested one gauntleted hand against a bulkhead. His fear was all for his crew, novices to a man, inept, incompetent... expendable. Hotepf glanced over his shoulder. Ah, Decius. The only one who knew what he was about... at least, as far as flying a ship went. As for the rest, well, Decius was just as inept as the next crewman.

Why had they been chosen? Hotepf knew why. This was what the High Command called an 'Honour-mission' - in reality, it was just a way for a once-favoured, once-feted Commander to die with dignity, and thereby remove his embarrassingly-subversive opinions from the Senate.

Why did this have to happen? He had not tried to press his views on anyone; as long as he was flying on the Home Patrol, he was harming no-one. Defending his planet, that he would do; it was only the idea of taking war outside the Empire that he disagreed with...

No need to ask how the Praetor had learned Hotepf's views. The presence of Decius on board told him all he needed to know. Poor Decius! What price his powerful friends now? After all, no-one in a position of power could afford to have an informant among their friends.

And so, here was Decius, on the same suicidal Honour-mission as the Commander he'd been trying to bring down...

What would happen, Hotepf wondered, if, in spite of it all, he managed to bring his ship and crew home intact?

Somehow, the idea appealed to him...

"A coin for your thoughts, Commander?"

"Flavian, my friend." Hotepf turned towards the Centurion, his friend. "I almost wish you had remained at home."

"Remained at home? How often do I get the opportunity to see both a new Cloaking Device and a new weapon put to the test?" The older man smiled. "They're retiring me after this trip, in any case."

"Commander." Decius looked up from the instrument display, his face distorted by the purple and blue of the lighting. "We are in range of the Earth outposts."

The Centurion fixed his friend with a faint smile. "Well, Commander. Shall we see how the new weapon performs?"

"I have no doubts about the weapon," Hotepf said, pitching his voice solely for the Centurion's ears. "What I do doubt," he went on, "is my ability to get my crew home afterwards..."

Some five solar years prior to the Romulan vessel's attack on the Earth outposts, Kharissa Wildern stared into the depths of space and watched the stars twinkle. They shouldn't have done so: they should be pinpoint bright and clear, moving in a slow skein past her ship...

Kharissa wiped her eyes. It wasn't often she indulged herself: one couldn't cry in front of the children, even if Keriss and Beauregard were adults in years. Bo would always be her little boy, no matter how old he was... Seventeen already, and in competent charge of the Spidersilk farms... And Keriss? How was she getting on at Medicol? - Four thousand light years from Zeluga, and she was still thinking of them! Enough!

WARNING, MRS WILDERN. WITHIN SIX L/YRS OF ROMULAN NEUTRAL ZONE.

She jumped a little as the tenor Compvox broke her reverie. "Thank you, Computer. Hold present velocity, set course for Earth outpost two."

ACKNOWLEDGED.

Outpost Two was where her late Bodypartner's brother was presently stationed. Tomorrow being the third anniversary of Brion's death, her daughter had suggested that Kharissa make the trip.

"Uncle Beauregard would love to see you, Mother," Keriss had said. "Besides, I can't get leave from Medicol, and Bo's needed at Shimmeridge. You shouldn't be alone."

And so, a week ago, Kharissa had lifted ship from Zeluga, somewhat against her better judgement at the time. Now, however, she was looking forward to the visit.

Kharissa contacted the outpost and gave them an ETA. Thirty-six minutes. That should give her long enough to get tidied up...

On board the Romulan ship, Hotepf knew it was all up with him. His ship was in ruins, his crew dead...if Decius had not challenged him, forced him to attack once more, when there had been no hope of a victory, they would be safe by now, safe under Romulan stars...

No point remonstrating with Decius. He had paid for his error with his life.

The Earth ship was signalling. Why? To gloat? However, it would be something, to be the first of his race to see what Earthers looked like...

Kharissa went aft for a shower in her quarters, and changed into a full-length rose-coloured Shimmerspidersilk - a present from Bo - which set off the dusky pink of her hair. Zeluga's unusual spectra had affected them all in one way or another; not only had Kharissa's hair altered from a rich chestnut to this strange, dusty shade of pink, but when she'd first arrived on Zeluga, she'd been almost six feet tall. Now, she was only five-seven.

But it was Bo who'd been most affected. Heedless of all warnings to stay out of the suns, and flatly refusing to be away from the planet for more than a month at a time, he'd undergone almost the entire range of Zelugan alterations; lilac skin, green and purple hair, restricted growth, and iron muscles.

Thoughts of young Bo cheered her. She unbound her shoulder-length hair from its severe bun, brushed it loose.

ORBITING EARTH OUTPOST TWO, MRS WILDERN.

"Thank you, Computer. Teggy?" Kharissa made her way into Medicentre, raising the Shipspider with a Mindtouch.

"I'm about to leave the ship," she told the six-foot bulk as it swung down from the Snugspidersilk hammock suspended from the ceiling. "Do you mind?"

"Negative, Honour-Mother," the baritone pseudovoice issuing from the spider's voxpack told her. "Do you have any specific recommendations for while you are absent?"

"No, thank you, Teggy. If there's anything you don't think you can handle, call me back. All right?"

"Affirmative, Honour-Mother." The hammock swung violently as Teggy clambered back into his nest. "Send my greetings to your Honour-Brother, Honour-Mother."

"I will, Dear. Sleep well, but not too deep." Kharissa smiled. "Computer? Tell Beauregard I'm ready when he is!"

"...just one last duty to perform..."

Hotepf turned away from the screen, pain burning in so many places that he hardly noticed. Reaching the panel, he used the last of his strength on the Autodestruct lever, felt his ship shudder as she flashed with burning white fire, felt the deck beneath him convulse with the vessel's death throes... His last thought was one of regret.

Regret that so many men had to die just to remove him from politics...

Kharissa had been on the outpost for less than an hour when a

call came through to Beauregard's quarters.

"Sir, we have a distortion in space. Possibly caused by an alien vessel."

"I'll be with you at once. Kharissa, you'll excuse me?"

"I'll come with you."

"Sir... " the voice continued. "Whatever it was, we just lost it. It disintegrated. Running analysis through computing now."

Labyrinthine passages flew by as Kharissa hurried after her brother-in-law. She managed to keep up only by using the Zeluganspider Mindcontrol exercise to lighten her personal gravity. When they finally emerged at the Command Post, Kharissa was almost floating.

"All right, run that tape!" Beauregard ordered.

"What is it?" Kharissa asked, peering over his shoulder.

"Romulan vessel. First sighting in over ninety years... Wait - look, it's just blown! God, what a mess!"

"I wonder how many people died... "

"Don't upset yourself, Kharissa," Beauregard told her.

"Entering the Neutral Zone constitutes an act of war. - Where's that analysis, Lieutenant?"

Kharissa got to the console first. "What does that mean?" she asked, pointing to an unusual readout.

"Anomaly. The force of the blast's affected the space/time fabric... best guess is a timeslide effect. You don't see these very often, Kharissa..." He pressed a few of the many switches in front of him, stopped, uneasy, and looked up to find his sister-in-law glaring at him. "What is it?"

"You've just watched the deaths of who knows how many people, and all you can do is press buttons?"

"What d'you expect me to do? Call the Chaplain? Kharissa, they were Romulans! Not like us..."

"How do you know?" Kharissa asked coldly.

"What?"

"How do you know they're not like us? Have you ever seen a Romulan?"

"No - but the records of the last war show... Look." Beauregard changed tactics, seeing he was getting nowhere. "If it makes you feel any better, these buttons I've been pressing tell me that the ship we just saw came from the future. When in the future, I can't say. But it means they're not dead - yet. Not really." He shrugged. "I just don't understand you."

"If you lived on a non-Federation planet like Zeluga, you might. All this running about killing people..."

"Kharissa!" He gave up. There was no arguing with her when she got onto the subject of non-violence.

"Mrs. Wildern?" The lieutenant broke in, for which Beauregard was undisguisedly grateful. "Call from your ship. Requesting you return right away."

"Oh. Thank you. Beauregard?"

"I'll have you back in a millisecond." Trying to hide his relief at getting rid of his sister-in-law, Beauregard led the way to the Transporter Room. "I hope it's nothing serious."

"I expect Teggy's just a bit worried by that explosion."

"Well, let me know, won't you?"

"Of course. Goodbye."

Almost as the 'Drunkboat' solidified around her, Kharissa was grabbed by a delicate forelimb, extruded by Teggy from within his exosuit, and dragged towards the Medicentre.

"The ship - you saw? I found a survivor!" Teggy announced as Kharissa followed his tripodal progress along the corridor.

"What?"

"Computer sensed a Lifeform. I predicted that the ship would explode." The Shipspider paused for effect, to continue in a smug tone, "I effected a rescue."

"Well done, Teggy. Is your survivor badly hurt?"

"I know not."

Kharissa hurried into the Medicentre and across to the still form on the treatment table, pushing her surprise at his appearance to the back of her mind. Curiosity could wait.

"Teggy, take a blood sample and run it through full analysis and extrapolation for me. Then start producing Healsilk - as much as you can."

"Affirmative."

The face was a green mask of blood. Well, that had to be stopped. Kharissa extended her mind, healing prescience seeking the extent of the man's injuries. She applied mental pressure, commanding blood vessels to constrict while she stimulated the cells to repair the damage. That done, she turned her attention to his eyes, looking for damage to the optic nerves. She laid a hand across the brow ridge, feeling for the degree of harm... she couldn't tell.

Well, that was something - had he been blinded, Kharissa would have known. Her mind traversed the rest of his body... Two cracked ribs, a severely ripped quadriceps, multiple bruising and some burns. Nothing fresh Healsilk couldn't take care of... except for his eyes. Checking she hadn't left any blood vessels constricted, she eased her

mind out and went to wash the blood from her hands.

Oh, Silks! She hadn't called Beauregard yet... What to tell him...? *I think I've got a Romulan aboard?* Fine, except she'd probably have to hand him over as a spy, or something. But who was to say that in the time from which he came, Romulus would still be the adversary it had been in the past?

She flipped a wall switch.

"Computer?"

YES, MRS WILDERN?

"Contact Outpost Two. Tell them I have to leave at once - say the children need me. Then plot a course towards Zeluga, via the Intergalactic Void. Have we enough stored power to run on Autosystems?"

AFFIRMATIVE, MRS WILDERN.

"Fine. Then actuate the course, keeping speed down to less than ten Lyrs/Hr."

ACKNOWLEDGED.

"Honour-Mother?" Teggy pivoted the top carapace of his exosuit to look at her. "I have results for you. Extrapolation confirms: being is male, Romulan, approximately in his sixth decade. Body functions and dietary requirements correlate closely with Vulcan physiology."

"Thank you, Teggy. Are you ready to spin Healsilk for me?"

"I am at present ingesting my second vegetable pellet. I will be ready to produce Healsilk within three minutes. I have altered my enzyme systems to comply with Vulcan physiology."

"Good." Kharissa wheeled the treatment table into the decontam. area, stood back and activated it on the Vulcan setting, hoping the differences between Romulan and Vulcan would not prove extreme enough to cause him any harm.

Fine needles of Decontam fluid spiralled down, evaporating on contact with the figure and taking dirt, dried blood, and any harmful bacteria with it.

The man's clothing disintegrated too, she noticed. He must have been exposed to a lot of radiation for that to happen. As a precaution, she checked herself, found she was clean.

The Deek fluid stopped falling. Green lights flashed across the board. No infection would get hold of him now.

Kharissa wheeled the treatment table back under the main spotlight, covered her patient with a Snugsilk sheet that would automatically maintain him at his optimum body temperature and stay that way, keeping him comfortable.

Now Kharissa could make out his features, she could see the similarities between Vulcans and Romulans: the same brow and ear configuration, the same tint to his skin tone. She found herself absently tracing the line of one upswept brow ridge with a finger-

tip, enjoying the texture of his skin beneath her fingers. She came back to herself with a start, trying to be more objective. But, really, he was so... And she hadn't seen muscle tone like that for years. What colour eyes would he have...?

"Teggy?"

"My first piece of silk is on the platform now, Honour-Mother."

Teggy swung his spinning platform towards Kharissa, easing the piece of silk carefully off the rim of the spinning-ring with three limbs. Kharissa took it like some elaborate cat's cradle, laid it across the Romulan's eyes and smoothed it into place.

"Two pads of Eyehealsilk?"

"Affirmative, Honour-Mother."

While Teggy spun the special Eyesilks, Kharissa laid her hands across her patient's forehead, stimulating the bruised areas to faster repair.

"Eyesilk, Honour-Mother."

She took the silk from Teggy, placed the thicknesses across the man's eyes, and asked for more silk.

MRS WILDERN?

Kharissa stirred, turned over, fell back into her web of sleep.

MRS WILDERN! Compvox was louder.

"What?" She surfaced fully, pushing sleep away. "What's wrong?"

WE ARE WITHIN ONE HOUR OF UTILIZING ALL RESERVES OF STORED POWER, MRS WILDERN.

"Oh, Heavens!"

Kharissa dressed quickly and fumbled in the galley for an instant coffee and an even faster breakfast from the Autochef unit. She and Teggy had been five hours yesterday working on the injured Romulan; no wonder she'd been tired enough to sleep for over fifteen hours.

She ate in silence, memories of Brion keeping her company... Three years gone, already. Shaking off the spell of the past, she called in to the Medicentre, approaching the Romulan and resting her fingers on the facepiece of the swathes of silk that cocooned him from head to foot. Body systems were well under repair, her Healsense told her. The cracked ribs were already barely discernible from the undamaged ones... the torn muscle would probably be sore for a few days, but on the whole... Kharissa withdrew her touch. She remembered Brion lying as still as this, the absolute stillness of death.

She gave herself a little mental shake. This one was alive.

.

The Crystal needed attention. A lift carried her down to the Crystal housing room on the lower deck, and she took her seat opposite the great, gleaming sphere, placing the Neuronwiring recharging cap on her head. All she had to do in order to fill the psistorage cells with the telekinetic impulses which powered the ship was to sit back and relax. Her thoughts drifted freely while the psi from her mind was carried through the pickups in the cap and into the Crystal, which amplified the strength of any psi directed into it. Psistorage was then fed the telekinetic impulses it needed, ready to be drawn on at any moment.

An hour, and the Compvox informed Kharissa that the process was complete. She felt as fresh as when she started; despite having trained as a Healer, Telekinetics was her forte.

Satisfied with the condition of the ship, she returned to the main deck, drew herself a cup of Terran tea, and took it with her to the Medicentre where her Shipspider was sitting with the Romulan.

"All right, Teggy, I'll take care of him for a while. Go and have a nap."

"My gratitude, Honour-Mother. I am fatigued." Teggy replied, clambering up into his hammock, the Snugsilk swinging as his limbs vanished into it.

Kharissa took her place at the side of the treatment table, rested a hand on the Romulan's forehead. She felt the first stirrings of his mind begin as he rose towards consciousness, and lifted her hand away, stroking the dark hair as she did so. She sat back in her chair, drank her tea, and waited.

Commander Hotepf opened his eyes to blanketing whiteness. His head ached... impossible that he had survived... He remembered the pain, acrid air, burning circuitry, the flash of fire. Had he been taken aboard the Earth vessel, despite his words to its Commander?

"Hello."

The voice was female, warm, and curious. The Commander turned his head in its direction, swallowed, and attempted to speak. His throat resisted. The unseen female seemed to anticipate his inability.

"Don't worry, I've something to help you. Here."

His head was lifted and supported, and a drinking vessel placed against his lips. The liquid was unfamiliar, sweet, but sharp, and cool to his dry throat.

"Better? I'm Kharissa Wildern, Owner-pilot of this ship, the 'Drunkboat'. Zelugan registry."

Hotepf found his voice returning.

"Then I am not on the Earth vessel?"

"What Earth vessel? Your ship was about to explode. Teggy rescued you."

"Madam, I had no wish to be rescued. It is my duty to die with

my ship."

"Sorry if we spoiled your day. As a matter of fact, you spoiled mine, too."

"I have the right to go down with my ship - "

"I'm afraid it started without you."

"Unless a state of war exists, you have no right to take me prisoner - "

"I'm not at war with anyone. Besides, even if I was, I couldn't take prisoners - I don't have a brig. Now, you'll excuse me while I check you over?"

Hotepf tried to move. His body, although willing, was unable to comply with his commands.

"It would appear that I would be unable to prevent you."

"I know that, but it's only polite to ask."

Hotepf felt his hair compress as the woman laid a hand gently above his ear, her palm and fingertips initially cool, then vibrant on his scalp. The sensation spread as she placed her other hand on the opposite side of his head. The pain at the back of his skull eased, ceased. Tension lifted, he found he was relaxing in spite of himself as warmth tingled across his head and face, swirled around his throat and extended to enfold the whole of his body.

Kharissa worked silently, mentally following the warmth she was generating within his flesh. He'd healed remarkably well so far, although the leg and shoulder injuries might still cause discomfort. She removed her mind from its exploration, lifted her hands away. Her patient exhaled slowly.

"Any pain?" she asked him.

"None."

Kharissa slid a fingernail under the edge of the Healsilk across his forehead. The silk cracked, showing it was ready to be removed.

"Who are you?" she asked, cautiously lifting the first section of silk away.

"Commander Hotepf, of the Romulan Empire."

"Well, Commander, you seem to be well on the way to recovery."

She ran a finger across the freshly-healed skin of his forehead, pleased with the result, moved on to the next piece, easing it lightly away from his right cheek.

Strange. Until the woman had begun to remove the dressings, Hotepf had not been aware of them. Cool air brushed the exposed skin of his face as she lifted the last facepiece away.

"That's healed beautifully. I'm leaving the eyepads until last; you're right under a spotlight."

Kharissa removed Healsilk from his neck, her hands delicate on his throat.

An image of Flavian, Decius, the novices whose names Hotepf hadn't had time to learn flashed through him. He exhaled heavily.

"Commander?"

"My crew are all dead."

Kharissa felt his vocal chords reverberate under her fingers.

"Yes, I know. You were the only survivor. I'm sorry."

Silk lifted from his shoulder, his chest.

"And the Earth vessel?" he asked.

"I thought I was the only ship in this sector." Kharissa continued removing Healsilk.

"How far are we from the Neutral Zone?"

"I've really no idea, Commander. Not that I'd be willing to tell you, in any case."

"I understand."

The final piece of Healsilk was removed. Kharissa replaced the Snugsilk sheet.

"I'm dimming the lights. Don't be alarmed if everything's dark at first." Gingerly, she lifted off the eyesilk pads. Delicate fingers touched his eyelids briefly. "If you'd open your eyes, Commander, and tell me what you see?"

"Dim shapes... Did you move?"

"Yes." Everything seemed all right, so far. "I'm turning up the lights."

Gradually, the darkness diminished until the room was light enough for Hotepf to see, and be seen, clearly. The woman came back to his side.

"Now, let's see..." Kharissa leaned over him. "Oh, very nice -"

"To what do you refer?"

She caught herself with a start, not realizing she'd spoken aloud. But then, brown eyes had been known to have that kind of effect on her.

"Ah... Any problems, Commander?"

"My sight is clear enough, but I am concerned by my perception of colour. Unless your hair is naturally pink, Madam."

Kharissa primped her hair. "Of course it's natural! I've never used a hair dye in my life!"

"That was not my meaning, Madam."

"Oh." She adjusted the top section of the treatment table, helped the Commander into a sitting position. "In that case, your colour sense is fine. And in case you didn't catch it before, my name's Kharissa Wildern."

"Tell me, if you would - " Hotepf indicated a large, fuzzy bulge hanging from the ceiling - "what is that?"

"That's Teggy's nest. He's sleeping at the moment."

"I had not known Humans slept affixed to the ceiling?"

"No, we don't." Kharissa smiled. "Teggy's not Human - he's a spider."

"Do you refer to the octopodal, silkspinning life forms indigenous throughout the galaxy?"

"Yes, Commander."

"Then is that not a rather large nest for a spider?"

"No. Teggy's a rather large spider. Excuse me."

She left him to think about that while she went through to the compsole in the prow of her ship, keeping her Mindseye firmly fixed on him, not at all sure what he'd do next.

"Computer, engage Securispeak and Obtuseness Circuits, please."

YES, MA'AM. The computer's speech patterns altered to comply with Securispeak, and the accent changed from precise English pronunciation to an American drawl.

"ETA galactic rim, please?"

DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH, MA'AM.

"I want to be within the intergalactic void within an hour. Increase velocity accordingly. When in proximity range, activate negating shields against galactic barrier effect. Acknowledge?"

CAN DO, MRS WILDERN.

"Thank you - oh, we have a passenger. Answer any of his questions that fall within security parameters. Refer to me if a conflict arises in your programming."

YES, MA'AM.

Kharissa left the flight area and collected a spare Snugsilk robe for the Commander, which was the best she could do for him until she could get Teggy to spin a Suitsilk shipsuit for him. Somehow, she didn't think it would be a good idea to trot him into the nearest outfitter's.

A warning bell sounded in the back of her mind, and she focussed her attention.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," she told Hotepf, via a comm. switch. (Hotepf, who had been attempting to leave the treatment table, froze at the sound of her voice issuing from the wall speaker). "... Your co-ordination's bound to be a little off

for a while. Stay where you are, and I'll be in directly."

Hotepf returned to his former position thoughtfully. Was this female able to read minds? If so, had all her race this capacity? It would explain how the Captain of the Earth vessel had been able to predict Hotepf's every move... Somehow, he had to wrest control of this ship and return home with this information.

But this woman... She did not fit the picture he had of her race. Indeed, she contradicted everything he had been taught to believe. How could a part be greater than the whole?

"Commander? Here, I've brought you this. When you're ready, I'll take you to a stateroom."

She smiled, and handed him a garment of the same fabric with which he was covered before turning away to examine a display on one of the instruments.

Hotepf shrugged into the garment, trying to ignore the pain in his side. Immediately he was dressed, he felt more in control of the situation. Perhaps while her attention was elsewhere - ?

"Ah, you're ready." She turned and came across to him. "Now, put your arm around my shoulders... carefully..." She eased him off the treatment table and supported him to the door while he got his balance.

He had not thought Terrans to be a physically strong race, but the woman supported his weight with ease. How many other misconceptions lay between their peoples? However, here was a chance...

She continued to assist him as they went down a short corridor. She stopped to palmprint open a door, Hotepf released himself from her support, made his move...

... and came to with a soft surface beneath him. He tried to sit up. A restraining hand on his chest prevented him.

"Easy," the woman said. "You - ah - slipped, I think. Yes, you slipped." She smiled. "There's a couple of things I ought to tell you. For a start, if you should ever feel like playing rough, that's fine by me. I'm good at it. I've won the All-Zeluga Unarmed Combat Trophy for three years running. So it'd be a waste of time for you to try and take over the ship. Apart from the fact that you wouldn't be able to activate the controls - because there aren't any - we've already left the galaxy and only Computer and I know the way back..." Kharissa realized she still had her hand on his chest. She took it away. "But that's not all. When your ship blew, it slipped through time. You're living in your own past."

"Should that prove true - "

"It's true. Otherwise, I'd be able to take you to any planet in your Empire you wanted."

She was not lying, Hotepf was sure. In any case, theoretically at least, it was possible that the explosion of the Cloaking System could have opened a channel in the space/time continuum.

"This... alters things somewhat," he admitted.

"I couldn't agree more." Kharissa smiled briefly. "Now. This room's yours for as long as you need it. Personal hygiene unit's through that door, this is an entertainments facility, linked to Internship communication and the computer system. I've cleared you for computer access; it might be able to answer more of your questions than I could. We've got some interesting film and music tapes. Some of them are hundreds of years - "

"What do you intend to do with me, Madam?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Any suggestions?"

"I have the right to an honourable death."

"So you've said. You're not serious, I hope?"

He said nothing.

"I'm sorry, Commander, but it's out of the question." Kharissa said briskly. "This is my ship, and I'd be the one who had to clear up the mess. The matter is closed." In a more gentle tone, she continued. "Computer's Vox-operated. Use the comm. switch if you need anything. I'll leave you to rest."

At the door, she turned back. "Oh, Commander. I've never met any Romulans before... may I ask you something?"

"Proceed?" Hotepf was cautious; presumably any information he gave her would go straight to the Federation.

"Didn't your mother ever teach you to say 'thank you'?"

As soon as she was gone, Hotepf eased himself off the bed and over to the computer outlet.

"Computer?"

YEAH?

"Compute distance from Romulan Neutral Zone."

BIT OF A HIKE, PAL. BEST PACK YOUR SANDWICHES.

"What?"

*I SAID 'IT'S A BIT OF A HIKE - ' *

"Enough. Present position of this craft?"

IN SPACE.

"Where in space?"

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.

Hotepf sighed and tried a different line of attack; the woman had said they had left the galaxy...

"Computer, have we left known space?"

THAT DEPENDS ON HOW WELL YOU KNOW SPACE.

"Are you able to plot a course back to the Romulan Neutral Zone?"

SURE CAN, PAL.

The answer surprised him: was it possible that the woman had not foreseen he would ask for this information? Whatever the reason, it meant -

"Computer, plot the course."

NOPE.

"Plot course to the Neutral Zone."

NOW, LISTEN HERE, BUDDY, I AM NOT GOING TO PLOT THAT COURSE! WANNA KNOW WHY?

Exasperation warred with curiosity. Curiosity won.

"Why?"

THREE REASONS. ONE: YOU AIN'T THE PILOT. TWO: YOU DIDN'T SAY 'PLEASE', AND THREE: I DON'T BELIEVE IN LITTLE GREEN MEN, BUD.

"What did you call me?"

'BUD'.

Kharissa, who had been fed a relay of this by the Computer, couldn't prevent a smile. Those Obtuseness Circuits were worth their weight in Erotisilk! It wasn't fair to laugh. But at least Computer had stopped the Commander feeling suicidal; now, he was merely feeling murderous.

"Madam," Hotepf's offended tones clipped out of the speaker. "Your Computer appears to be malfunctioning."

"Does it, Commander?" Kharissa replied into the comm. pickup in front of her. "I'll check it out for you. Meanwhile, you can watch something from our Entertainments fax while I do."

In his quarters, Commander Hotepf stared incredulously as the Computer screen blanked, and then filled with an animated grey cat and a brown mouse who were engrossed in beating each other into strange configurations with whatever came to hand. A strange race, Humans, if they trained their pets to do this sort of thing...

"Commander?" Kharissa cut the cartoon by remote. "I've checked the computer, but I can't find anything wrong. I can't think what the trouble was, unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Computer's very sensitive. If you're not polite, it often gets upset. After all, good manners don't cost anything, do they?"

Hotepf was sure he heard a reprimand in her tone. "I begin to comprehend the situation, Madam."

"I hope so, Commander."

There was no sound to indicate that the link had been cut: she was, apparently, waiting.

"Thank you for your assistance, Madam."

"My pleasure, Commander."

Several hundred light years away, Kharissa's daughter was making a long-distance phone call.

"Earth Outpost Two. Commander Wildern speaking."

"Hello, Uncle Beauregard. It's Keriss here, relaying from Medicol. Is Mother there?"

"Why, hello, Keriss - no, she left over 24 hours ago - said she'd a message that you youngsters needed her."

"Not me, Uncle. Must be Bo. Okay, thanks for your trouble."

"Not at all, Keriss. Outpost Two out."

Kharissa lay back in what would have been the control seat, had there been any need for controls, letting her mind drift with the ship, extending her Mind's eye into the external optics so that, in effect, she was seeing through the restricting barrier of the hull. The blanketing vastness of the intergalactic night was almost a tactile sensation, the darkness curdling like a smooth, black cream. Kharissa drew back, opened her prescience and absorbed the moods of the ship; Teggy, matted in a web of sleep, spinning dreams. The Commander -

She shied away, not wanting to pry, even if it was for his own good. Just what was she supposed to do about him? She knew what she'd like to do with him, but that was hardly the same thing: he touched a chord in her that had lain quiescent since Brion's death.

Something Keriss had said, giggling over a trace of tea leaves in her mother's cup, came back to her...

"You're going on a trip where you'll meet a tall, dark, handsome stranger."

"Oh, not another one!"

"Mother! No, look at that. See?"

"Keriss, that's a squiggle."

"To you, it's a squiggle. To me, it's this man. He'll need your help."

"Keriss, if one of the men on Outpost Two is dark-haired, over five-eight, in need of a ride home, and just happens to know you, I warn you -"

"No, honestly Mother, I haven't set you up." Keriss smiled.

"This time."

"Keriss! I should hope not! I'm quite capable of finding my own Bodyfriends if I want to!"

All harmless fun, it had seemed. But had that silly tea time game of her daughter's been genuine clairvoyance for once?

Kharissa found herself looking for an excuse to visit the Commander's quarters...

"Shimmeridge Silkfarm, Gossamer Inc. B.A. Wildern speaking."

"Bo, it's Keriss. What the Silk are you playing at? I thought we'd agreed to call each other if we had any problems and leave Mother in peace! What's so important?"

"What are you on about?"

"Bo, where's Mother?"

"... Er... Outpost Two?"

"What's going on? Uncle B. said she'd had a message one of us wanted her, and left. She isn't with you?"

"Nope. You tried calling the Drunkboat?"

"Of course. No answer. She might be outgalaxy...?"

"Or she might be in trouble. I'm nearest Outpost Two, I'll go look for her. Borrow your ship?"

"Of course. Let me know as soon as you find her."

"Will do, Sis. Zeluga out."

A light knock on the door of his stateroom caused Commander Hotepl to look up from the Entertainments fax. He stilled the picture.

"Come."

Kharissa entered, twisting a pack of cards in her hands. "I'm not disturbing you, I hope?"

"No. I was merely watching this film."

She approached and leaned over his shoulder to see what he'd been watching. Oh, yes.

"One of my favourites, Commander. Do you like it?"

"I do not fully understand. I have played it twice in an attempt at full comprehension, but... The conflict referred to interests me, although the weaponry appears somewhat primitive. Particularly worthy of note is the bravery of those who were posted on the island... However, I fail to see why there are so many spontaneous outbursts of song - and do Earthwomen usually sing

whilst washing the hair? Is it common practice to perform one's ablutions in the open air? And why does a female sing a song to a man who is poorly disguised as a female, particularly as the song should more properly be sung by a man of a woman? The language, too, is difficult. There is a reference to a primitive form of explosive - why should the female in the song be used as a receptacle for sixty inches of Dynamite? And what is an inch?"

"Oh, dear. May I sit down?"

Once Kharissa had explained the plot of 'South Pacific' as fully as she could, Hotepf inclined his head.

"That is much clearer to me now, Madam. I... thank you for your assistance."

"You're welcome, Commander Hotepf." She sat back in her chair, glad he hadn't been watching 'The Sound of Music'. She didn't understand that one herself...

"But you did not come to enlighten me about a film?" Hotepf prompted.

"Oh. No, I didn't." She remembered the real reason for her visit.

"I think I have a way to find out when you're from."

"Certainly, the distance of my timefall is vital in deciding my future actions, but I fail to see how this can be calibrated without a common frame of reference?"

"With these." Kharissa tapped the cards on the table in front of her, turning them over to display the pictures. "Tarot cards. Widely used in the past for divination and - "

"Superstitious idiocy!" Hotepf rose to his feet.

"Now, just a minute, Commander!" Kharissa, too, rose, her voice sharp.

"While I agree that some of the forms used in the past were undeniably primitive, in the hands of an expert - one with the right training - "

"I have heard of these Vulcan mind-tricks!" He turned his back on her, his expression almost a sneer.

"'Vulcan'...? I'll have you know, Commander, that I can knock any Vulcan alive - and some of the dead ones, too - into a cocked hat, and - "

"Why should you wish to knock a Vulcan - "

"I'm a leading parapsychologist and an authority on Tarot divination. I can prove that it works."

"How?"

"I'll show you, if you like."

"Very well."

Kharissa sat down again, waiting for the Commander to do likewise before selecting a card from the pack.

"The King of Swords," she said. "This card represents you, as you are now. And this one - " she indicated the Knight of Swords, "represents you as you were before your timeslip. The relative positions of these two cards should tell me how far you've come." She shot him a quick glance. "Among other things. What's your full name?"

He told her.

"Trust you to be difficult."

Kharissa gathered up all the cards, shuffled them, and laid them face-up in three rows.

"Interesting..." She counted along the rows until she came to the first of the two cards she'd chosen for the Commander. "According to this you're forty-six - counting in Romulan years."

"A fortunate estimate."

"Hardly." She gave him an appraising stare. "Especially as you don't look a day over thirty five."

"I am not convinced of the accuracy of your cards."

"Yet." Kharissa looked at the cards again. "Commanding a spaceship was not what you wanted to do in life; you'd have preferred something to do with the sea. You have four children, but you're estranged from their mother - no, mothers..."

"You have made your point, Madam."

"Commander, are you experiencing memory loss of some sort?"

"Not to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

"Twice I've told you my name. You haven't used it yet."

"I am unsure of the title to affix, Madam."

As an excuse, it sounded pretty weak, but she let it pass.

"Kharissa's fine, Commander."

"My Ren-name is Ankh."

Kharissa nodded acknowledgement and turned her attention back to the spread in front of her, counting from the King of Swords to the Knight.

"You've come about five standard years, Commander."

"Five years, lost?"

"No. Gained. Five years of your prime to live over again, wherever you want. However you want."

For a moment he almost smiled, then shook his head slowly. "And you would permit me this chance?"

"Why not? My Homeworld's a non-Federation planet - as long as you don't do anything to start a war in our galaxy, or take back information to Romulus - "

"I am a man of honour!"

"Forgive me. But you understand."

"In any case, I cannot return home. Who would believe that I am who I am? - I should be executed as a spy. Or if I should meet myself? But where is there for me to go?"

"A non-Federation planet, like Zeluga. Another galaxy, perhaps? I'll drop you off anywhere you like."

"Even into another galaxy, Kharissa? You are generous with your hospitality."

"It's no trouble in this ship. Besides, I didn't have anything planned for a while."

"Then I will consider your offer. If I could find somewhere to be still for a time... I am tired of duty and politics." He smiled. "Foolish. Where can such as I find peace?"

"Come with me."

Kharissa led the way down a corridor, palmed a door open.

"But these are your quarters. Why do you bring me here?"

"You'll see. Well, come in."

Hotepf followed her into the room, trying not to be too obvious in his curiosity as Kharissa stood on a raised dais and tugged on a handle affixed to the ceiling. A section of ceiling unfolded, extending into steps which mated with the platform on which Kharissa stood.

"Ankh?"

He followed her up the steps and into a domed area, barely high enough for him to stand upright. The floor was obscured by cushions and synthefurs, and he lowered himself into a comfortable position. Kharissa slid a panel over the dome access in the floor, and turned to her guest.

"A small piece of Heaven, and the only place on the ship where I can't hear the Computer." She sat down, companionably close, but not touching him. "Comfortable?"

"Yes, Kharissa."

"Watch." She pressed a switch on the wall panel, and the overhead dome split along its centre, folding back to floor level. Another switch dimmed the lights until all was dark.

The darkness grew in intensity. Only the rustle of movement as Kharissa shifted position assured Hotepf he wasn't alone.

"Impervoglass." The woman's voice was almost a whisper, preserving the sanctity of the darkness. "This is where I come to find peace."

Hotepf's eyes adjusted. Complete emptiness arced the heavens except for a faint smudge in the lower left quadrant.

"That's Andromeda," Kharissa said. "Two days away in this ship."

"How did you know what I was looking at?"

He was sure she smiled. "There isn't much else to see at the moment. Once your eyes adjust fully, you'll see a slight swirl, above Andromeda and to the right. Serata galaxy. Nice place; there's some lovely solar systems there. Have you ever been?"

"I? How could I? There is a barrier which defines the edge of the galaxy. We are unable to cross."

He lay back, felt his shoulder make contact with his companion's. She did not draw away from his touch, and when she spoke, her voice was the voice of the void itself.

"They say this is the loneliest place there is."

"I do not find it so," he replied.

"Ankh," she said presently, "You're in pain."

"An ache, nothing more."

"You should have said. Let me - "

"Do not trouble yourself."

"It's no trouble."

Unerringly, she slid her hand inside his robe, rested it over the damaged ribs, his skin warm to her touch. She extended a part of her mind to ease his pain, and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Is this necessary to the healing process, Kharissa?"

"No. Do you mind?"

"I have no objection."

She shifted position to allow him to free his arm. His hand came to rest on her hair, and he traced the curve of her ear gently. Her healing touch became a caress, as she slid her fingers up through his chest hair to the side of his throat.

"This is not the Romulan way, Kharissa," he informed her as she placed a light kiss on his cheek.

"Maybe not, Ankh-Hotepf. But it's the only way I know."

Within thirty minutes of speaking with his sister, Bo was inside her ship, the Einstein's Breakdown, and lifting to orbit, using all his determination and inherited ability to power the psychic ship at vast speeds towards the last known position of the Drunkboat - the area around Outpost Two and, not far beyond: the galactic rim.

.

To wake with the warmth of a female body pressed against his was a sensation Hotepf had been unused to of late. A pleasant sensation, more so than he recalled. Those of Human extraction were really remarkably sophisticated, if Kharissa was anyone to judge by.

She stirred in his arms and he stroked her hair, causing her to wake.

"Sleep well?" she asked, stretching.

"I did, Kharissa."

She leaned across to reach the wall panel, brought the lighting up to an easy glow.

"There ought to be a sunrise," she remarked.

"Why so?"

"Oh... symbolic, I suppose."

"Of what?"

Kharissa looked at Hotepf, lying with his eyes closed, apparently unaware he was smiling. She found a smile on her own face. "Everything."

"Kharissa, how does the sun of your planet rise?"

"It depends where you watch it from. And which planet."

"Your computer answers questions in much the same way you do."

"Sorry. I was Earth-born, but I make my home on Zeluga."

"You spoke earlier of Zeluga as a place where I might live with impunity?"

"Mmm. A neutral world, and only lightly colonized. And the sunrises are beautiful."

"Tell me?"

"You can't see many stars from Zeluga. It's an ageing planet, a heavy-world. No high, sharp mountains - on Zeluga, mountains undulate. A temperate world, a lovely place if you don't mind weighing almost twice your natural weight."

"So. Zeluga is what gives you your strength."

"In part. Colour is different on Zeluga, too; purples, pinks and greens predominate. The sky has a pre-dawn clarity I've yet to see elsewhere. It starts as a dark indigo, then lightens through the purple range. The first sun is a sphere of silver, ringed by a blue corona. After a few minutes, the red sun leaps into the sky..."

"Continue?"

"I can't. There's no common frame of reference. You'd have to see it to understand."

"I should like to, Kharissa."

She propped herself up on one elbow. "Really?"

Hotepf opened his eyes, nodded slightly. "Really."

She traced the line of his mouth gently with a fingertip. "You should do that more often. It suits you."

"I believe I shall, now that I have a reason to smile."

"I've some things I must do," she said in a sudden change of mood. "It won't take long."

Kharissa checked and secured ship as quickly as possible, programming the computer for emergency communications only; how long this interlude with Ankh-Hotepf would last, she'd no idea, but she intended to make the most of it.

Having cut forward power so the ship was cruising on impetus, and ensuring she'd have complete privacy, she glanced in on a now-hibernating Teggy, collected a supply of food and drink packs from the galley, and returned to her quarters.

The door to the hygiene unit was closed, a blue light indicating the shower was in use. Kharissa deposited her tray on the table and slipped through the inner door.

"I see you found the shower. Here, let me." She dropped her robe, stepped in behind Hotepf, and began scrubbing his back.

"Kharissa!"

"You sound surprised, Ankh. Don't tell me Romulans never explored the alternative uses of a shower unit?"

" - "

"And you said I had a lot to learn!"

Because ships in space have no weight (only mass), and since thought is instantaneous, psychic spacecraft such as the Einstein's Breakdown and the Drunkboat are also instantaneous - or nearly so, allowing for the esper rating of the pilot and how many obstructions are in the way.

Beauregard Aloysius Wildern hurtled the Einstein's Breakdown at a rate of light years a minute, narrowly avoiding a comet, three planets, an asteroid belt and five Federation ships in the space of four Greenwich hours. None of the ships tried to stop him for speeding; the ship was moving so fast it didn't register on their instruments. At present velocity, Bo estimated it would take him twenty-five hours to cover the same distance his mother had travelled in eight days.

"Is there anything you wanted to do today?" Kharissa asked, halfway through her breakfast. Hotepf smiled at her across the table. "I meant apart from that. I want to talk to you."

"About what, Kharissa?"

"How long you want to stay on Zeluga, for one thing. Where you're going to stay."

"I had assumed I'd be your guest?"

"... assumed... "

"Forgive me. I ought to have said 'hoped'."

So, she wasn't just a shipside Bodyfriend to him, then?

"You'll be more than welcome."

"Then, too, the duration of my stay is likely to be dependant on your wishes... "

Kharissa remembered it wasn't polite to sit with one's mouth open.

"By taking me from my ship before it destructed," he went on, "you have given me five years. I offer them back to you."

"Ah... don't offer me anything yet. Not until you know the whole story..." She hesitated before continuing. "I've two children. Both grown up, but when they're not buzzing around the galaxy, they live with me. Their father died three years ago."

"I don't understand. Do they present some difficulty?"

"No, I just thought - "

"Do you have any images of them?"

Her smile was more than a little relieved. "I've a whole storage unit full. Like to see?"

Using the Crystal unit in the 'Breakdown's' lower deck as a viewer, Bo scanned the past of the Galactic Rim to find out when, and where, his mother had crossed the Barrier... Yes! There it was - and not too long ago, either. From the projection in the Crystal, it looked as if she'd been moving pretty fast - had she been pursued? But there was no sign of another ship...

Bo hurried back to his pilot's seat on the main deck, ignoring his fatigue. Time was of the essence now.

"She is like you, your daughter. Only, I think, not as beautiful."

"Thank you." Kharissa put the image blocks away, took out another stack.

"More images of your children?" Hotepf asked.

"You've only been looking at them for an hour. No, these are of Zeluga. Give you something to do while I recharge the power system for the trip home."

"Must you do this now?"

"Yes. Unless you want to get out and push? It's a great ship, but it's murder to bump-start."

"Very well. After I have looked at your Homeworld, I shall await you above."

"All right. But don't hold your breath."

"Why should I wish to...?"

"Just a figure of speech. That's all."

Bo woke in his pilot's seat with a start. The last thing he knew, he'd been twenty Lyrs out of the galaxy, with no sign of the Drunkboat. That had been... he checked the chrono... two hours ago.

A sweep showed a shadow at the very edge of his range... the Drunkboat?

Gathering together his depleted mental reserves, Bo nudged his ship around to the new heading, and sped towards his mother.

Satisfied that she'd got the Drunkboat's storage systems as full as she could, Kharissa stretched and returned to her quarters. She sensed Ankh-Hotepf, easy in sleep, and climbed silently into the dome to avoid waking him. Sliding the floor panel closed as silently as possible, Kharissa knelt on the cushions beside him, watching the slow rise and fall of his chest, unconsciously falling into the same breathing rhythm, unaware that he was rising to wakefulness.

Brown eyes opened to look at her. A hand curved around the back of her neck, pulled her mouth to his.

Yes, it was the Drunkboat, all right. Bo opened a comm. channel to the ship.

No reply. The ship just lay there, hanging in space like a derelict. Bo switched to scanning systems... the ship was on half-power, and Computer didn't answer.

Alarm sprang into full-blown panic; not even Teggy had answered the signal.

Bo rummaged for the gun his sister had told him was on board and then headed for the Apporter facility. Preset controls flipped him across the gap between the two vessels.

He crept silently up from the Apporter area on his mother's ship. Lights were down; everything on silent running. The Drunkboat - not a large ship by anyone's standards - now seemed vast and cavernous.

Emerging at last on the flight deck, and seeing no-one in the immediate vicinity, he made for the computer console.

"Computer?" His voice was a whisper. Computer, in accordance

with Kharissa's programming for everything to be kept as quiet as possible, replied in like manner.

yes, master wildern?

Relief was a shivery wave washing over Bo. If Computer was all right...

"Where's Mum?"

she is in her quarters with a romulan male.

Not surprisingly, due to the quietness of Computer's voice, Bo misheard.

"Mum's drinking Romulan Ale in her quarters?" That stuff was vicious! And how long had she been drinking alone? -

negative, master wildern. Computer corrected. *i said she's in her quarters with a male romulan.*

A Romulan...! Waiting for no further information, Bo ran, lightening his personal gravity to reduce the noise of his feet along the floor of the corridor.

Heart pounding with adrenalin and exertion, he halted outside his mother's door, pausing to bring the noise of his breathing under control.

Gun ready in one hand, he palmed open the door.

Nothing. No-one.

Bo eased himself inside and saw that the steps to the Observation Dome were lowered. The ceiling panel had been closed from above.

His mother was trapped in there - with a Romulan!

No-one knew for sure what they were like. But everyone had a theory, each more unpleasant than the last.

Beauregard swallowed, wiped out images of his mother, dead, dying, or mutilated beyond help.

No noise from above.

What next? At the moment, presumably, the Romulan was unaware of his presence. Should he wait here, in ambush, for his mother's captor to come down? Or move now, and risk losing the element of surprise when he slid the panel back?

But who know what state his mother was in? Psi centres depleted by the effort of driving the ship, Bo couldn't tell if she was up there, let alone whether she was alive or dead.

He didn't dare wait. He licked dry lips, swallowed, and climbed slowly, and quietly, up the steps.

Hotepf snapped instantly awake. Something... On the very edge of his hearing, something. He eased himself gently over Kharissa,

putting his body between her and the floor panel. It was too dark to see if it was moving; too dark to see anything but outlines.

A near-imperceptible squeak from the panel. Whoever was down there was likely to be in less-dark surroundings, and therefore able to see even less than Hotepf.

It was a somewhat slender advantage.

Bo crouched on the third step from the top, the panel wide open above him. He breathed through his mouth for quietness, listening hard.

No sound from above.

The back of his neck prickled, and he could feel the hair rising in spikes all over his scalp. Making sure of his hold on the gun, he tensed his thighs, increased his weight until it was as much as he could bear. He pushed against the pressure, suddenly releasing control to become as light as he could, springing up and back to land all-but silently on the edge of the panel.

Hotepf saw a dim figure shoot through the opening, heard the catfall landing.

"Don't move, Romulan! I've got a gun pointed right at you." The voice wavered between adult and adolescence. Hotepf kept silent and still, aware that any sound would give his unseen adversary a target at which to aim.

"What have you done with her, Romulan?"

The tension in the dome penetrated Kharissa's sleep. Coming back to consciousness, she instinctively lay still while her mind swept about her. Hotepf's fear - for her, she noticed with a sudden surge of affection - was the loudest emotion in the room, blanketing almost every other thought pattern. But there was another presence, just discernible...

"Beauregard?" Kharissa's voice was quiet.

"Mother! Are you all right? It's okay, I've got a gun on him - you're safe now."

"Beauregard, watch your eyes. I'm turning up the lights. And if you do have a gun, then put it down, there's a dear."

"But - "

"Mind your eyes, now."

Kharissa wrapped a synthefur about herself, fumbled until she found one for Hotepf and pushed it across to him. Gradually, she brought half-light back to the room.

"Sit down, Beauregard."

Blinking, he did as he was told, legs dangling over the edge of the floor panel. His watering eyes cleared, and he blinked again, slack-mouthed, as he saw his mother, wrapped demurely in synthefur, resting her hand possessively on the shoulder of a dark-haired

alien.

"Now, stop being silly and put that gun down, Bo. This is my... friend, Commander Hotepf, late of the Romulan Empire. Ankh-Hotepf, my son Beauregard."

Bo dropped the gun. Kharissa retrieved it, smiling as she examined it.

"Manners, Bo," she prompted.

"Sorry, Mother. H... How do you do, sir?"

"I am pleased to meet you. Your mother has told me much of your courage. I see she did not underestimate you."

"Braver than I thought, too." Kharissa lifted the gun, pointed it away from them, and depressed the trigger. A popping sound, and a small flag bearing the word 'BANG' unfurled from the muzzle.

Beauregard blushed purple.

"Never mind, dear. Everyone makes mistakes," Kharissa told him. "Now, why don't you go down to the galley and make us a nice, hot, old-fashioned pot of tea?"

"Yes, Mother." Bo slithered onto the steps.

"Oh, and Beauregard?"

"Yes, Mother?"

"Next time you come into my room, remember to knock."

"What is it, Ankh?"

"A wonder: sunrise on Zeluga."

"You've said that every morning for the last sixteen months."

"And every morning it is differently wonderful than the last."

He turned away from the Windowall, smiled at his Bodypartner as he sat on the bed and enfolded her in his arms. "But sunrise is not the only beauty I shall regret leaving."

"It's not definite we'll join the Federation. Why, there's even a 'Keep Zeluga Octopodal' campaign!" Kharissa tried to keep her voice level.

"Headed by our young Beauregard. Yes, I know."

"And even if we did join, you've got Zelugan citizenship - you don't have to leave -"

"I must. I could not, in all conscience, live in a system against which my race has striven for so long. But that is not all. Your children - Keriss, at least - could build a brilliant career within the Federation. How would my presence affect her future?"

"It could be years yet -"

"And every day I remain here, it becomes more difficult to contemplate leaving. Yet I cannot stay. But... I have had a place to be still for a while. Peace. And a reason to smile."

"When do you wish us to leave?"

"'Us', Kharissa?" His hold tightened a little.

"You offered me five years, remember? According to my reckoning, there's still over three and a half years left. You're not getting out of it that easily."

"You would give up all this to be with me? I do not even know where I shall go."

"I do. Serata galaxy. There's a planet there - Cezra - where I have friends. We can take a shipload of Spidersilking with us. The Cezrans love it, they'll pay almost anything for top-quality Spidersilks - "

"But the children?"

"They've got brilliant careers ahead of them, remember? But they don't have to stay. And they can always visit. Serata's less than seven days away in the Breakdown."

"And your home?"

"Look, I know you've got the ears for it, but will you stop playing Devil's Advocate? Home is where the heart is."

"Where is your heart, Kharissa?"

She stroked the side of his ribcage. "In there."

The sky paled to mauve silk. A blue ring of fire surrounding a silver sphere crested the horizon. A spaceship, small, dirty-hulled, inconspicuous, lifted to meet it, slowly at first, gathering speed, piercing the cloud cover, up through the atmosphere and into an orbit which slingshotted the craft out towards the Galactic Rim.

"Computer, set velocity at 50 Lyrs/hr. Call me when within two hours of using all stored power."

ACKNOWLEDGED, MRS WILDERN-HOTEPF.

"Kharissa."

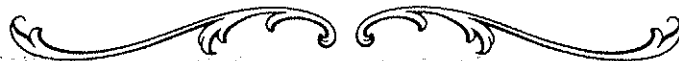
She pivoted her seat about. Ankh-Hotepf stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame. Leaving her seat, she went to him and he put his arm around her shoulders.

"Tell me, Kharissa. How does the sun rise on Cezra?"

"It's rather boring, I'm afraid. Only one sun."

Hotepf held her at arm's length, gave her an appraising look.

"I am sure that, with you beside me, Kharissa, one sun will suffice."



THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL

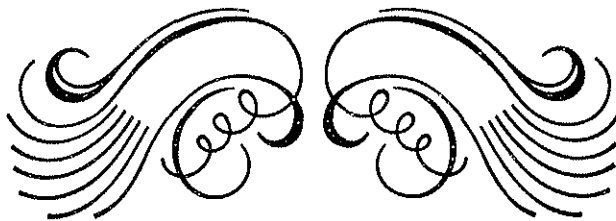
Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Can you tell me
Who is the Fairest of them All?

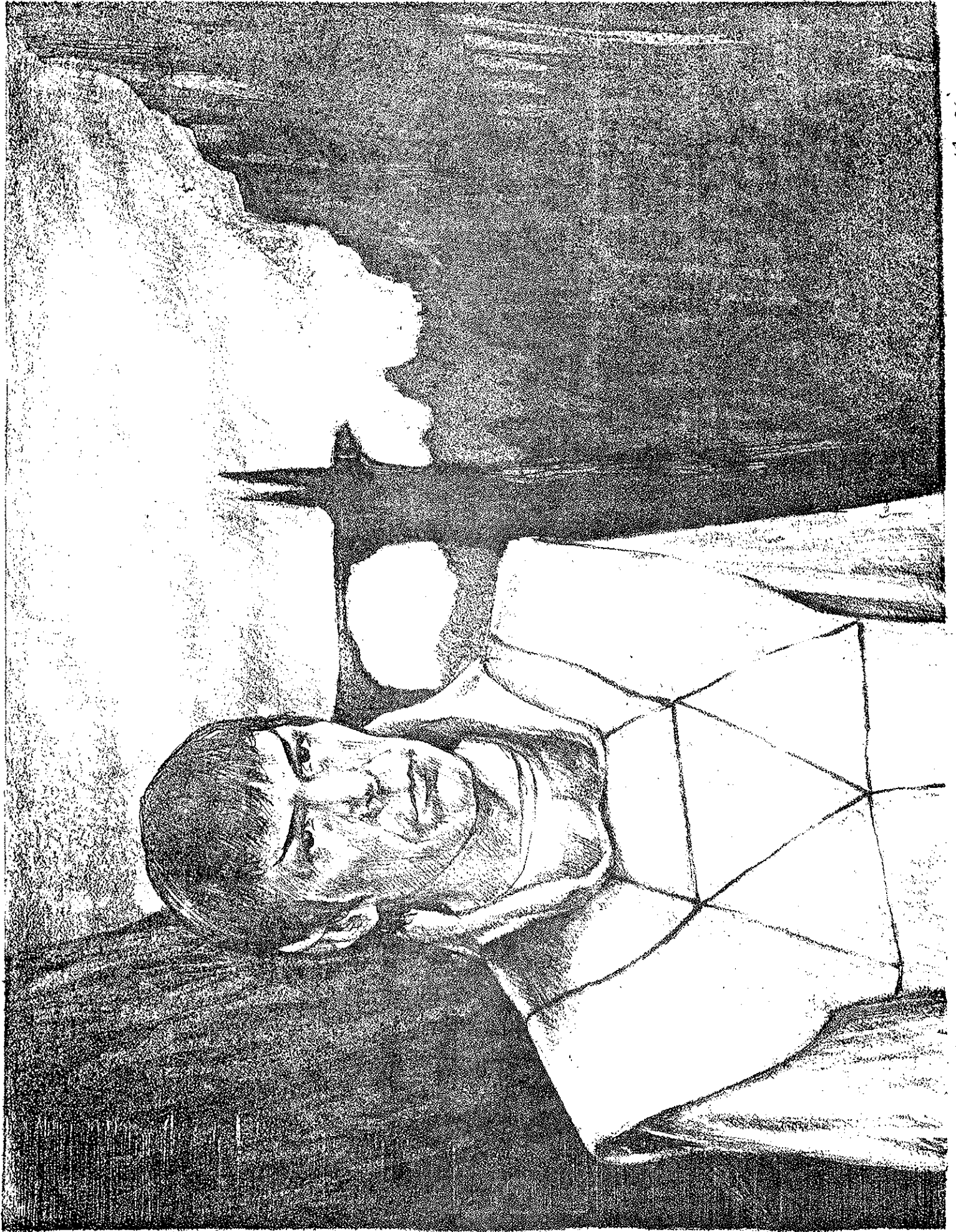
Is it Captain Kirk with his
Golden hair and hazel eyes?
Or Spock, our logical Vulcan
So dignified and tall?
Could it be Dr. McCoy,
The ship's blue-eyed boy?
Or could it be Scotty,
The ship's engineer and miracle worker?
Then there's Uhura,
Beautiful of face and voice -
Is she the logical choice?
Let's not forget Sulu,
Who is, at heart, a dashing swordsman of old.
And then there is Chekov
Who likes to think that everything
Originated in Russia.

Who, then, can tell me
(Without bias or favour)
Which of these people
Deserves to be called
The Fairest of them All?
For each and every one of us
Will say that their favourite
Deserves the acclaim

Perhaps it would be best to say
That all deserve the title;
For each, in their own way,
Is the Fairest of them All.

Christine Jones





40036

D.N.A.

by

Joyce Devlin

"Captain's Log, Stardate 8803.2

"The Enterprise has been ordered to Starbase 9 to pick up a group of Federation delegates and transport them to Merkalon, a class M planet in need of a planetary government. The United Federation of Planets has been asked to send a group who would be able to design a government in tune with Merkalon's needs. The Enterprise has been put at their disposal for as long as the talks require."

Captain James T. Kirk sealed the log entry and sat back in his command chair.

"I hope this is not a re-run of Babel," Chekov, the Russian navigator, said quietly to Sulu at the helm.

"You're not the only one, Ensign," Kirk replied. "However, you have all heard the orders, and know that we could be in and around Merkalon space for quite a while."

"So what do we do while the talks are going on? Hang around in orbit?" McCoy asked from behind Kirk.

"You heard the new orders, I take it, Bones."

"Yep, and I don't like them."

"Yes, well neither do I, but they are our orders. And to answer your question, there's an uncharted section of space and a nebula approximately six days at warp 5 from Merkalon. We are ordered to explore and chart; so no, we will not be hanging around in orbit."

"Good."

"Approaching Starbase 9, Captain," Chekov reported.

"Thank you, Mr. Chekov. Uhura?"

"Sir?"

"Request permission for a parking orbit."

"Captain, I have Admiral Topaz for you."

"On main viewer."

"Jim! Long time no see," came Topaz' opening line.

"Admiral."

"Sorry, old chap, but a parking orbit is out of the question."

"Sir?" Kirk asked, puzzled.

"It's quite simple, Jim. You'll have to dock the Enterprise."

"But Starbase 9 doesn't have a docking bay big enough for a ship this size," protested Kirk.

"It does now. Shows how long you've been galloping round the cosmos, Jim. Starbases 1 to 10 have all been modified to include docking for two Constitution-size Starships, and all now have a space dock repair centre, so I hope you remember docking control procedure. See you in half an hour. And Jim..."

"Sir?"

"Don't dent the hull." The Admiral went off the air laughing.

"What was all that about?" McCoy asked.

"What was all what about?"

"Denting the hull."

"A private joke - nothing else."

"Well it sounded more like a warning to me. If I'm needed I'll be in sickbay; I'd rather not witness this particular manoeuvre." McCoy headed for the turbolift.

"Sir, Starbase 9 requests you reduce speed to manoeuvring thrusters," Uhura's voice cut in.

"Mr. Sulu."

"Reducing to manoeuvring thrusters." The Enterprise was now under Sulu's experienced hands. "Manoeuvring thrusters now, sir."

"Dock control reports ready, sir," Uhura reported.

"All right, Mr. Sulu, manoeuvre us into docking position."

A few moments later there was a loud clang as the Starbase's airlock connected to the Enterprise.

"Dock control signalling manoeuvre complete, Captain, and the airlock may be operated at any time," Uhura reported.

The reaction on the bridge was one of relief, as it wasn't every day that a Starship docked airlock to airlock with a Starbase.

After the briefing with Admiral Topaz Kirk met his six passengers, four men and two women.

"I am Tannasha, Captain. We have all heard so much about you."

"Pleased to meet you," Kirk responded.

"Tannasha is our legal expert, Captain," the man who introduced himself as Dillion explained.

"And I am Dillion's wife, Tura," the other female added.

The other two males Kirk knew already, so introductions were not required. One had been a schoolmate, the other he had met the last time he was on Earth.

Starfleet regulations had been followed exactly by Spock, who during Kirk's absence on the base had ordered a formal, dress uniform dinner for the delegates and section heads.

"I feel like I'm in a dog collar that's one notch too tight," McCoy grumbled to Kirk and Spock as they made their way to the dinner.

"That is impossible, Doctor, as the computer never makes mistakes; and may I point out that is is a standard programme for the computer to scan your size when a request for clothing is made," Spock informed him as he kept tugging at his collar.

"That's all right for you to say, Spock, but it's not your neck that's in a vice, it's mine."

"Bones, Spock, give it a rest tonight, please," Kirk requested.

"Sure, Jim. I will if the walking computer here stops coming up with smart-ass replies every time I complain about this damn collar."

"May I suggest that you refrain from eating for a few days, Doctor; then your dress uniform would not be too tight - if indeed it is."

"Spock, give up. Bones, don't you dare reply. I want a pleasant trip with no mishaps this time."

The dinner went off well enough, but Kirk found himself uncomfortable in the presence of Tannasha. There was nothing he could put his finger on; unless it was the fact that her eyes followed him everywhere, and the one thing he hated was a woman watching him as closely as she had during dinner.

It was several days after the dinner that Kirk again noticed her in the rec room watching him intently as he moved a chess piece across the board.

"Checkmate, Jim. Your mind is not on the game," Spock stated.

"Sorry - what was that, Spock?"

"I said your mind was not on the game."

"No, it wasn't. For some reason I just don't seem able to concentrate tonight."

"I had come to that conclusion."

"Spock, I'm going for a swim." Kirk stood up and headed for the turbolift.

The swimming pool was virtually deserted when Kirk came out of the changing room into the pool area. The only other person there was Tannasha. Kirk stopped dead, turned, and headed back into the changing room to get dressed again. He was becoming extremely tired of being followed around his own ship by the female lawyer. He wouldn't have minded so much, he supposed, if he had been attracted to her, but he was not. There was something about her that made him feel very uncomfortable, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was.

Dressed again, he made his way up to sickbay in search of Dr. McCoy.

"What's up, Jim?" McCoy asked as his friend plonked himself down in the chair in front of his desk.

"I've a headache," came the reply.

"You want the usual two pills, no doubt."

"It's not that kind of headache, Bones. It's Tannasha."

"Tannasha? That's the red-head with the delegation party."

"That's right. Every time I turn around she's there watching me. Those eyes of hers unnerve me," Kirk tried to explain.

"Don't you like her?"

"She's all right, but frankly I'm not attracted to her."

"She is to you."

"What? What made you say that?"

"Exactly what you said, Jim. She's always watching you."

"Bones, that's all I need just now."

"Look, Jim, just don't let yourself become attracted to her. She's Darnicanian, and once you become attracted to her, well..."

"Darnicanian? I thought she was Human." Kirk was puzzled. "They're usually pure albino, with the ability to change shape at will."

"Yes, that's true, but in Tannasha's case her father was Darnicanian, her mother half Darnicanian, half Human. Her grandmother had red hair," McCoy informed him.

"Bones, how do you know all that?"

"I asked her."

"Ask a silly question," Kirk responded as McCoy smiled.

"How else do you think I found out, Jim?"

"Like I said, Bones, ask a silly question."

"And get a silly answer back - or in this case, an obvious one. So, Jim, don't even think about making love to her. You know the legend."

"Yes. Once you've loved a Darnicanian you don't have any enjoyment anywhere else. I've heard it, and quite frankly I'm not tempted," Kirk informed him.

"Well, just don't let that be your famous last words. Anyway, you've only got to put up with her for a few more days, so relax. Just try to enjoy her company. She's a stranger, remember, on a strange ship; she's seeking company - your company. It might just be that she's as uncomfortable as you are, and not attracted to you at all. Companionship is more important to a Darnicanian than sex."

"You obviously had a very informative talk with her, Bones."

"Yes, well I made it my business to learn more; it's not every day that Starfleet hands you a Darnicanian on a plate, and as..."

"... the opportunity to study her was there you took it, right?"

"Right."

"I might have guessed. Well, I'm off to bed," Kirk announced as he stood up.

"Feeling better?"

"A bit. See you in the morning, Bones."

A few days later Kirk found himself in Tannasha's company, but instead of avoiding her he invited her back to his cabin for a quiet drink; as soon as he had done so he could have kicked himself.

"What would you like to drink?" he asked as she sat down.

"A brandy, please," she requested.

"One brandy coming up." Kirk poured the amber liquid into two glasses and handed her one.

"Captain..."

"Jim."

"Jim, I'm sorry if I trouble you. I seem to turn up everywhere either just before or just after you do," she said.

"There's no need to apologise. It's a big ship, but a small recreation area."

The evening was passing too quickly for Tannasha; when Kirk was called to the intercom, with his back turned he did not see her slip the contents of a small capsule into his drink.

"Right, Mr. Spock. Call me if you require my presence on the bridge. Kirk out." He finished his brandy, then looked at Tannasha thoughtfully.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"No, not really, just a small problem in engineering. Spock or Scotty are quite capable of handling the situation. Would you like

another drink?"

"Please. Jim, can I use your...?"

"Yes, it's through there," he answered a little sluggishly.

Tannasha smiled to herself as she entered the bathroom - the drug was beginning to work. However, when she returned to her dismay she found him lying unconscious on the floor.

"Damn! I guess you just had too much to drink for it to do any good. Well, let's get you to bed," she said to the unconscious figure as she dragged him into his sleeping area, heaved him onto the bed and stripped him naked. Silently she covered him with the quilt, then quickly undressed and slipped naked between the sheets beside him.

"Well, if you can't, I can certainly make you think you did," she whispered softly into his ear as she switched off the bedside light.

When she awoke the next morning the figure beside her was still in the same position as the night before, and snoring gently. He woke abruptly, however, as the computer alarm sounded his wake-up call.

"What the hell...?" he started to say as he sat up, realising that he was in his own bed, and naked.

Tannasha pretended to stir. "Good morning, Jim," she smiled as he turned towards her.

"Oh hell!" he muttered. "Tannasha, I..." He fell silent, raking his memory, but he could not remember how or when he had got to bed. His colour had paled drastically.

"Jim." She stroked his arm.

"Did we...?" He lowered his eyes.

"Did we? Oh, you mean did we make love. Don't you remember? You said it was a wonderful experience. I must say, you can certainly give a woman pleasure."

Oh boy, I certainly blew that one, Kirk thought as he swung his legs out of bed. A swamping dizziness hit him behind the eyes, and he grabbed at the bedside unit for support.

"Jim, are you all right?"

"God, I'm going to be sick!"

When Kirk returned from the bathroom he was relieved to note that Tannasha was up and dressed.

"Are you all right now?" she asked.

"I will be once I get a detox shot from McCoy," he told her, adding quickly, "Tannasha, about last night..."

"What about it?"

"I never meant us to end up in bed together. I'm sorry." He could not meet her eyes.

"Don't worry about it, Jim." She smiled triumphantly - he had fallen for the deception.

"There's no chance you could become pregnant, is there?" he asked, hauling on his trousers.

"That remains to be seen, Jim."

"Christ, that's all I'd need!"

"Look, Jim, don't worry. If I am I am; if I'm not I'm not. It's not your problem, something can be worked out."

"If you are I want to know." Kirk shot the words out. "If you'd said last night you weren't protected, I wouldn't have done anything."

"Jim, it's clear you don't know much about Darnicanians. Look, our metabolic makeup is totally different from the Human one. Have you never wondered why we don't require reproduction guidelines? It's quite simple. A Darnicanian female can only produce two offspring in her lifespan, which keeps the population down."

"That's all very well. However, if you are pregnant it will be my child, and I need to know so that you will receive maintenance for the child and yourself. It's the least I can do."

"Oh, Jim..."

When Tannasha had left his cabin Kirk opened the intercom and called McCoy to his cabin. The Doctor took one look at his friend and administered the detox injection.

"It'll take about ten minutes to be fully effective. Jim, what happened? It's unlike you to get so drunk you need a full detox."

Kirk told McCoy everything he could remember, and also about his conversation with Tannasha that morning.

"Jim, I warned you. Hell, when will you ever learn?"

"Bones, I don't need a lecture. I told her I'd pay maintenance if she's pregnant."

"You did what? Jim, do you realise what you've just done? She's a lawyer - she could take you to the cleaners. Starfleet could insist on you taking a shore posting. You could lose the Enterprise!" McCoy was very, very angry.

"Bones, if I've got her pregnant it's my responsibility."

"That I agree with. However, she could have it adopted."

"Bones, stop it, please. My head aches."

"All right. But Jim - be sure it is yours, not someone else's."

"Don't you worry - if the crunch comes I'll trust you to do the necessary tests, okay?" Kirk looked at the time. "Hell, I'm late."

Just then the intercom buzzed.

"Kirk."

"Captain, we are now in orbit around Merkalon," Spock informed him.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. I'll be right up." Kirk switched off the intercom. "I still feel like death warmed up, Bones."

"Well, I can't give you any more detox. Look, if you don't feel all right after the delegates beam down, come and see me, okay?"

"I will, but no doubt you'll be up on the bridge keeping an eye on me. Let's go."

"Yes, and I guess anyone who crosses you this morning will feel the sharp edge of your tongue," McCoy responded as they left the Captain's quarters.

Kirk was grateful that the problem in engineering had developed to such an extent that his presence was needed. His apologies were made by Spock, and accepted by the delegation. The beam down was successful, and the Enterprise was committed to remaining in the sector for as long as the delegation remained on Merkalon.

The planet was made up of hundreds of little island groups, each one rich in a different type of mineral, and each with its own small government, somewhat like 20th century Earth. The United Federation of Planets had been asked to assist in the formation of a world government which would represent the needs of the whole planet; in return Merkalon would grant the Federation mineral rights.

Merkalon itself was indeed beautiful. Each island was spectacular on its own. The Federation group soon discovered this, and in the months that followed each member reported on the islands and island life.

The Main Land, as the inhabitants called the largest island, was not unlike Australia, having kangaroo-like animals and small bears not unlike koalas. This was where the government was to sit. Each island would send a representative, who would report back to a committee on each island. It took seven months to make all the arrangements.

Tannasha had been kept busy drawing up legal documents for signature. She had thrown herself into her work after a short-lived affair with Dillion, the leader of the delegation. It had lasted for the first three weeks of their time on the planet, when his wife was visiting one of the smaller islands. She was glad she had tricked Kirk into thinking he had made love to her, for now she was pregnant, and Dillion's wife must never find out that the child she was expecting was her husband's. She was thankful that her genetic makeup meant that she could hide her pregnancy until almost the eighth month, for by then she would be back on board the Enterprise.

Now the Enterprise was due. At least Dillion was the same colouring as Kirk, and she hoped the same blood type, although that was not much to worry about since her own Darnicanian blood would

hold its own, she hoped; after all, although she was red haired, a Human failing from her grandmother, her blood was Darnicanian - and so, she thought, would her child's be.

Completing her report she laid down her pen, sank back into her chair, and was soon asleep. Tomorrow was another day.

The Enterprise established her orbit at 12.00 hours, and requested that all personnel beaming up should do so by 14.00 hours. Starfleet Command had allocated Kirk only a two-hour stopover, with a scheduled return to Starbase 9. Due to the Enterprise having been tied up for so long there were more pressing situations needing her attention. Kirk had agreed - eight months was too long.

"Delegation signalling they are ready to beam up, Captain," Uhura informed him.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Mr. Sulu, you have the con. If I'm needed I'll be in the transporter room."

"Sir."

Kirk entered the transporter room as the figures materialised on the platform. Kirk froze as he saw Tannasha materialise; she was indeed pregnant.

As soon as the beam released them the delegation stepped down from the pads, but Tannasha crumpled to the floor.

"Dillion, did you know she was pregnant?" Tura asked as she knelt beside the still form.

"No. I saw her yesterday, and she didn't look like that," Dillion replied.

"Dr. McCoy to transporter room 2," Kirk said into the intercom before moving to her side.

"None of us knew, Dillion," one of the other delegates stated.

"She's coming to," Tura informed them as McCoy came through the door.

"I'm sorry," Tannasha said as she realised that she had changed shape. "Oh, I guess it was the transporter that upset me. I had started to change just before we beamed up. I'm all right, honestly," she protested as McCoy ran the scanner over her.

"Who's the Doctor around here?" he asked, not liking the readings he was getting.

"You are," she replied.

"Well, let me be the judge of whether you're all right." He scanned her again.

"Bones?" Kirk asked.

"Not now, Jim. Tannasha, I'd like you down in sickbay to run a few tests."

"Yes, Doctor, if you think it's necessary," Tannasha replied, noticing how pale Kirk had become.

"I do, and now's as good a time as any. Jim, I'll see you later."

Kirk knew better than to argue with his Chief Medical Officer when he used that tone of voice.

Some time later McCoy called the Captain down to sickbay.

"Come in and close the door, Jim," he instructed. "Now sit down."

"She is all right, Bones?" Kirk asked.

"She's fine, but I can't make head or tail of the readings on the child," McCoy informed him.

"Problems?"

"I don't know, Jim. Tannasha assures me that it's her genetic makeup and the child's, but...."

"But you're not sure, right?"

"Right. I should be able to tell how far advanced the pregnancy is, but I can't. She's at least seven and a half months if not more by Human standards, but then again..."

"Bones, what's the problem?"

"The problem is she's Darnicanian, and had no ante-natal care whatsoever."

"Is she in sickbay?" Kirk asked.

"No, I let her go to her cabin. What are you planning to do?" McCoy knew that look only too well.

"I don't know as yet. Find out if it's mine, I guess, then take it from there."

"Do you want a drink before you go?"

"Hell no, Bones - that's what got me into this mess in the first place." Kirk shot him a look of pure mock horror.

"Just asking."

After leaving McCoy's office Kirk headed down the corridor towards the guest quarters, where he found Tannasha alone.

"Do you feel up to talking?" he asked as he sat down facing her, his hands clasped in his lap.

"What do you want to talk about?"

"The baby. Is it mine?" He came right out with it; there was no use beating around the bush.

"Yes, Jim, it is," she lied; at least she was sure that this man was one who kept his word.

"Right, then. Once the baby's born I'll contact Starfleet and have the necessary financial arrangements made for you and the child," Kirk informed her without looking at her.

"Jim, you don't have to, you know. It wasn't your fault," she told him.

"I gave you my word. I intend to keep it. Now if you will excuse me, I am needed on the bridge." Kirk stood up and left her staring after him

She had offended him, that was certain; after all, she had known he would not go back on his word.

Later that day Kirk was on the bridge when he received an urgent summons to sickbay. His eyes met Spock's as he swivelled his chair around.

"Spock," he requested the Vulcan's company, adding, "Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

The turbolift deposited them outside sickbay. Kirk's heart was in his mouth - there could be only one reason for the summons. Tannasha.

The doors to sickbay opened at their approach. Chris Chapel passed, close to tears, and McCoy, his face like Vulcan stone, ushered them into his office and poured two very large drinks.

"Spock?" he asked, not looking round.

"No, thank you, Doctor."

"Bones..." Kirk pleaded.

"Here, drink this, Jim," McCoy instructed.

"Bones?" Kirk took the drink, his tone rising to the dangerous level detectable only to those who knew him well.

Taking a deep breath McCoy replied, "Jim, I'm sorry. I lost them both."

Spock placed a supportive hand on Kirk's shoulder.

"How? Why?"

"I don't know why. How - she simply bled to death. There was nothing I could do." McCoy was close to tears himself.

"The baby, Bones. I want to know."

This was what McCoy had been dreading, and Jim Kirk knew him too well for him to hide anything.

"Jim, I'm sorry. The poor wee soul didn't have a hope in hell of living even if it had been born alive."

"Doctor, you're hiding something from me. I want to see... my child." Jim Kirk stood up and strode out of McCoy's office.

"Spock, stop him," McCoy pleaded. "It wasn't a baby, but a... a monster."

At last Spock understood why McCoy was so shaken. It was not just the loss of mother and child, but the fact that his friend could have produced something that he considered a monster.

Kirk stood in total disbelief as M'Benga showed him the body of the child. His gut reaction was to feel violently sick.

"Jim," Spock said from behind him, "please come away. It serves no purpose to torture yourself."

"Spock, I created that... that..." Kirk stammered as M'Benga covered the body. "How?"

"Jim, it serves no purpose to torture yourself over something you could not control," Spock repeated, leading his Captain away from the stasis unit.

McCoy stood in the doorway. He had witnessed the scene, and wished there was something he could have done to prevent his friend's agony, yet knowing that he could not.

"Bones, please. I need to know how and why that happened. Please find out," Kirk pleaded; he was pale and badly shaken.

"I intend to, Jim. Now please go and try to get some sleep," McCoy told him.

"Rest? God, how the hell do you expect me to rest when that... thing... in there is meant to be my dead child? Bones, for the love of god, help me!" Kirk's control broke as the full impact of the shock hit him.

McCoy led him into a small room and settled him on the bed. Kirk was strong - strong enough, McCoy hoped, to put this to the back of his mind and carry on. As he administered a sedative he sent up a silent prayer to that effect.

All the blood tests on the child pointed to two things; the child was a Darnicanian/Human hybrid; and the mutation had been caused by radiation. McCoy didn't like those findings at all, and he knew that Kirk was blaming himself. With these new results he would blame himself even more, and there was nothing that McCoy could do to end his grief.

He had just switched off his computer terminal when Kirk entered his office. McCoy had kept him in sickbay overnight, and had allowed him back on duty two days ago, but it was clearly written on Kirk's face that he had not been sleeping.

"Bones, anything new?" he asked.

"Just that the child is a Darnicanian/Human hybrid, and that the mutation was caused by radiation. However," he hurried on, seeing the expression on Kirk's face, "we haven't established yet if it was caused by exposure, or genetic."

At that moment the intercom buzzed. "McCoy."

"Doctor, those results you wanted are ready. The mutation was caused by the Human genes present; whoever the father was, sir, I'd say he was in urgent need of a vasectomy," a disembodied voice informed them.

"There's no mistake, Lieutenant?" McCoy asked.

"No, sir. We've checked the findings twice, hence the delay. It's clear the Human element is at fault, and by the level of radiation in the cells it's clear there has been exposure to different types. We've been able to isolate several, and we're working on another two."

"Very well, Lieutenant. Keep me posted. McCoy out." McCoy looked at Kirk, who seemed to be staring right through him.

"Well, that settles it, Bones. Do what you have to do to me; I don't think I want to take the risk of fathering another child."

"You mean a vasectomy, Jim?" McCoy asked in disbelief.

"Yes, if that's what it takes. Just set it up, please."

"Look, Jim, there's no hurry. Let the lab finish the tests, then we'll go ahead if you still want to, okay?"

"All right, but I won't change my mind over this."

McCoy finally tracked Lt. Anderson to the lounge on the recreation deck. Beside her, as usual, was Shadow, the Security dog.

"May I sit down?" McCoy asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied, wondering what she had done wrong.

"I wanted to ask you about something I overheard you telling Lt. Benson the other week," he opened, sipping his coffee.

"What was that, sir?"

"All I can recall is something about all Security dogs are blood tested for proof positive of paternity."

"Oh, you mean DNA or genetic fingerprinting. It's carried out on all our dogs as a safeguard."

"Can you explain it to me?"

"As a Doctor, I thought you'd know all about it. It was developed on Earth in the 1980's, and was used by the police to catch rapists, and to establish Human paternity. DNA is deoxyribonucleic acid - it's found in all animal cells. We still use the procedure as a positive ID for our animals, but it went out of date for Humans last century when the databeta scan came into use. If you're interested, Doctor, I have an article all about DNA fingerprinting; it includes a point by point description of the procedure, so you could do it yourself."

"May I borrow it, please?"

"By all means. I'll drop it into sickbay in about half an hour, if that's okay."

"Great. Lieutenant, you may just have saved the day." McCoy patted her hand.

"Oh, I see now. It's got something to do with that baby that was born dead, right?"

"Yes."

"All right, Doctor, give me time to get to my cabin, then sickbay." With that she got up and left the lounge, Shadow at her heels.

The Lieutenant was true to her word. Not only did she bring the article, she also brought Shadow's DNA fingerprint printout for McCoy to see, plus some others.

"You see here and here? These two are Shadow's offspring, but this one is not, although it came from the same litter."

"Impossible!"

"No, Doctor, not impossible. A double mating. I saw it for myself. When you have two dogs and one bitch living together, accidents can happen. All the pups were black, and if it hadn't been for DNA, we would have assumed they were all Shadow's," she explained.

"I see. Right, Lieutenant, thank you."

McCoy instructed M'Benga to oversee the fingerprinting. Originally the process had taken two to three weeks, but over the generations it had been modified to three days.

Three days too long as far as Kirk was concerned, for on the morning of the third day McCoy was given an ultimatum - perform the operation or be transferred to a Starbase.

McCoy prepared him, then hesitated just long enough before beginning for M'Benga to come racing in.

"Stop!" he shouted.

McCoy jumped. "What the hell...?"

"If you're about to do what I think you are, there's no need. The Captain's DNA does not match the child's, and the Captain has never been exposed to Hirka radiation." M'Benga looked pleased.

McCoy wanted to weep tears of joy for his friend. "Chris, settle the Captain into bed," he ordered. "We'll let him come out of the anaesthetic naturally. Then I'll tell him." He smiled for the first time since the nightmare had begun.

A few hours later Kirk woke to find Spock and McCoy standing

either side of his bed.

"Jim, about the operation. Er... I didn't..." McCoy faltered.

"Doctor, you'd better have a damn good explanation!" Kirk flared.

"Captain, Dr. McCoy does have such an explanation," Spock stated.

"Well?"

"It's simple, Jim. You are most certainly not the father of that child." McCoy smiled triumphantly.

"Explain."

"Well, your DNA doesn't match up at all, nor have you been exposed to Hirka radiation."

Realisation dawned, and Kirk's face flooded with relief. "Then... Are you sure...? What in hell's name is DNA?"

"Jim, stop babbling," McCoy instructed. "Spock will explain DNA to you."

"But why would Tannasha lie?" Kirk asked.

"It was logical. She knew how you would react if she led you to believe that you were the child's father," Spock replied.

"It might well have been the fact that the real father could not or would not support her, and she knew you would," McCoy smiled. "Now where do you think you're off to?" he protested as Kirk swung his legs off the bed.

"There seems no reason for me to stay in sickbay - is there, Bones?" Kirk asked.

"Nope. But had M'Benga not interrupted the operation when he did, I hate to think what you'd be saying at this point, Jim."

"Not a lot I could say. After all, I lost my temper and threatened you with a transfer. Bones, I'm sorry. Forgive me?" Kirk asked as he faced the Doctor.

"This time. Only don't try and force me again - next time I'll stick to my guns, okay?"

"There won't be a next time. Bones. There's only going to be one Lady for me in the future, and we're on her. I've learned my lesson the hard way. Now where's my uniform?" Kirk looked round and saw Nurse Chapel approaching with his uniform. He took it and put it on.

"Jim, there's one lady you should thank," McCoy hastened to say.

"Who's that?" Kirk asked, pulling on his trousers.

"Lt. Anderson, and Shadow."

"What have they got to do with it?" Kirk stopped and stared.

"If it hadn't been for her and her article on DNA fingerprinting, you would be minus... Look, get out of here and Spock will explain it to you. Scram!"

McCoy smiled as his Captain walked through the door. So there was only one Lady in Kirk's life at the moment, but for how long? he wondered as the door closed behind the Captain and First Officer. Yes, it had been a nightmare, and he was glad it was over.

There was one last thing he had to do, and that was to send a recommendation to the Surgeon-General that DNA fingerprinting be added to the files of every member of Starfleet as a precaution against impostors, and to settle paternity suits. He included a detailed confidential report of the events of the last few days. No names would be made known, but McCoy was confident that the Surgeon-General would ensure that as a result genetic fingerprinting became standard procedure once again.



FRIENDS AND BROTHERS

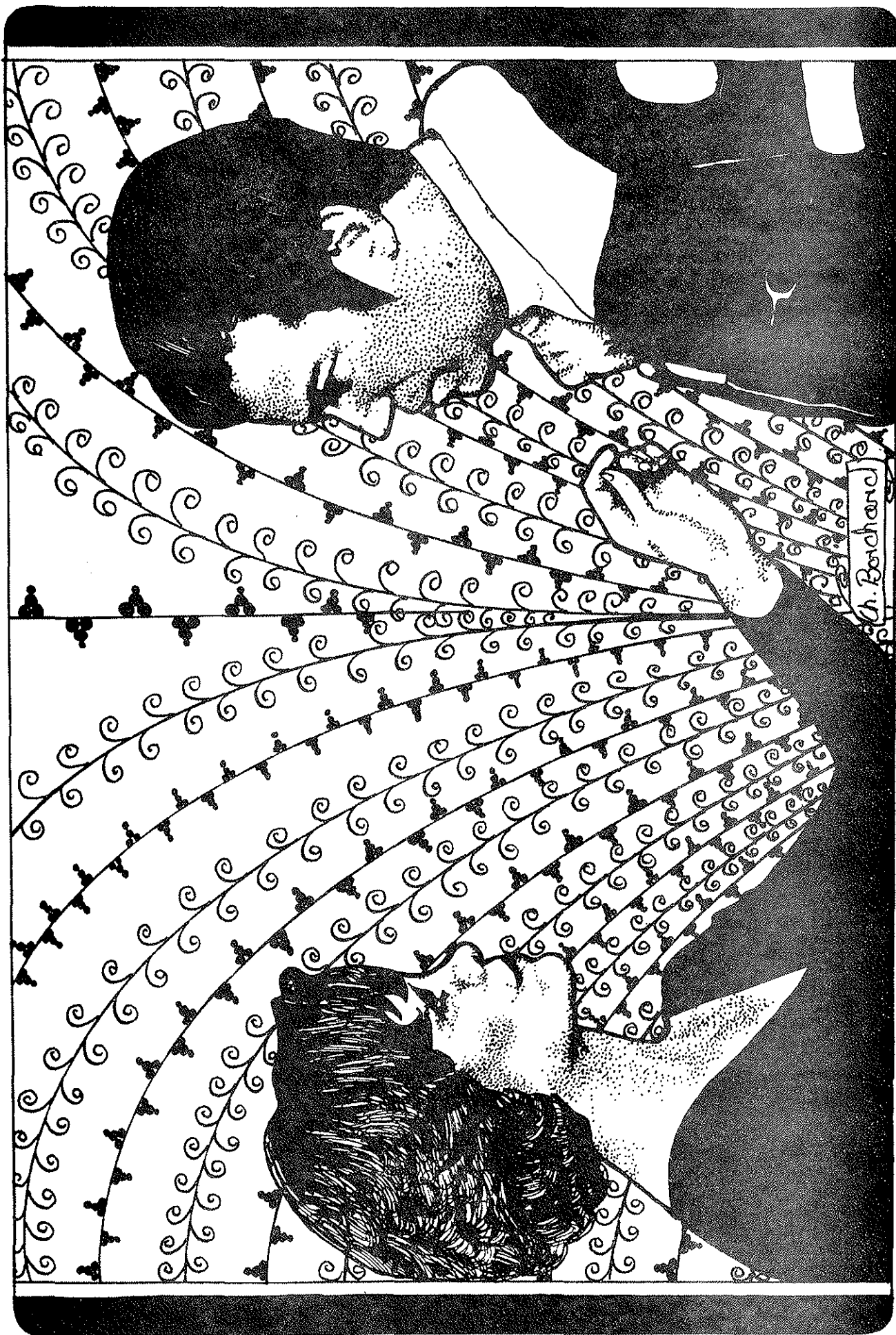
What was it that drew us together?
Two lonely people from two totally different backgrounds.
Whatever it was, neither of us would change things -
We are friend, brother and companion to each other,
Neither of us liking to be parted from the other for long;
Each fearing that, while apart, something might happen to one
That the other might have been able to prevent.

We are linked, we are joined,
Our minds are closely attuned;
We are closer than brothers -
We are brothers of the soul.
We are soul twins;
Alike and unlike;
We are two halves of the same whole,
Two sides of the same coin -
We are one.

Each of us would give his life for the other,
Preferring to die rather than live on alone.
Perhaps Fate will be kind
And allow us to die as we have lived -
Together.

Christine Jones





BECAUSE

Caveman Joe sat by the fire,
and dreamed about his one desire.
He'd leave the cave, and cross the wood,
and carry on until he stood
high up upon a mountain top,
and found out where the world would stop.
His wife and children screamed and cried,
"Why must you go wandering wide?
The spears you take could kill our meat.
The skins you take could warm our feet.
You're needed here - why must you go?"
"Because," he said, "I need to know."

Great grandson Mike sat in his hall,
And listened as the people all
protested that his plans were mad.
His ideas selfish, cruel and bad.
But in his heart he sat and planned
how he'd travel to another land.
The people shouted, every one,
"Why can't you stay as we have done?
The food you take will rob our soil,
We need the horses for our toil.
You're needed here - why must you go?"
"Because," he said, "I need to know."

Great grandson George sat on his throne,
Safe, protected, all alone,
And dreamed of how he'd lead his fleet
to bring new nations to his feet.
But more important still than that,
he'd find out if the Earth was flat!
His loyal subjects, all enraged,
were furious with the war he waged.
"The money that we need for bread,
You spend on building ships instead.
You're needed here - why must you go?"
"Because," he said, "I need to know."

And even now the people shout,
and argue what it's all about.
While children starve and mothers cry,
how can we make a spaceship fly!
How dare men head out into space,
if they can't feed the Human race!
But if Joe and Mike and George had stayed,
we'd still be living in our cave.
And some of us, like them it seems,
Persist in clinging to our dreams.
So though the prospects seem quite slim,
We hope and wait for grandson Jim!

Teresa Abbott

HIDDEN TRUTHS

by

Scott Nichol

Kirk reclined in the chair as Spock came to the end of a musical piece on his Vulcan lyre. "Spock, that was the best piece of music I've heard in a long time." He felt very relaxed as he picked up his Saurian brandy and took a delicate sip. "What is it called?" he asked.

Spock looked at his commanding officer. "It translates as *The Song of the Setting Sun*." He placed the lyre on its rest. "It is usually played at..." Spock was cut off as the intercom whistled and Commander Uhura's calm voice came on.

"Bridge to Admiral Kirk."

"Kirk here. What is it, Uhura?"

"Sir, we are receiving a priority code communication from Starfleet Command."

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances. "Pipe it down here, Uhura."

"Aye, sir," Uhura acknowledged.

The comm screen on Spock's desk lit up, displaying the UFP insignia. "Request voiceprint identification."

Kirk sat a little forward and folded his arms. "Kirk, Admiral James T."

"Voiceprint approved." The insignia dissolved and was replaced by a severe-looking man with a Commodore rank pin.

"Admiral Kirk, Commodore Matthew Whitfield, Starfleet Command here. We have intercepted some Klingon communications and it looks as if they have developed quite an interest in the sector that you are headed for."

"The Keberian System?" Kirk's entire body stiffened. "What kind of interest?"

"Intelligence believes that they might like to make it part of their Empire," replied the Commodore.

"But that's impossible! Keber is part of the Federation now. To try to take a Federation planet would result in hostilities between us and the Klingons - in spite of the Organian Peace Treaty."

"We do understand that, Admiral Kirk, so when you arrive at Keber II be cautious, but expect the unexpected."

"Understood," acknowledged Kirk. "We'll be careful."

"Good. If we get any more information we'll transmit it to you as soon as possible. Whitfield out."

Kirk turned to Mr. Spock. "Well, that's just dandy, isn't it?"

"Dandy, Jim?" Spock raised an eyebrow.

"Forget it, Spock. Let's get to the bridge."

Captain's Log - Stardate 7783.4

The Enterprise is four hours away from the Keberian star system. Our mission is to evaluate the science team which has been on Keber II for the past eight months. It is hoped that after the evaluation has been completed, a staging and storage Starbase can be built here which would strengthen formal ties with the Federation. However, Starfleet informs us that the Klingon Empire may also have designs on this star system.

The briefing room was full to capacity. Around the table sat Kirk, McCoy, Scott, Chekov, Sulu and Uhura, with Spock at the library computer. Other seats were occupied by Doctors Chapel and M'Benga and CPO Janice Rand.

Kirk looked at Spock. "Well, Mr. Spock, we're all ears."

Spock turned to the computer. "This is Captain Spock requesting information file 5Z-8EB."

The computer gave a small beep. "Ready."

Spock played a few switches and started speaking. "Keber II is situated not far from the border between the Federation and Klingon territory. It is the second planet of seven in this system, and the only one capable of supporting life. Keber's climate is dry and quite hot, with temperatures rising to 39.6 degrees Celsius on average." He paused and then pushed a few more switches. "Keber suffers from extreme changes in rainfall patterns; these disrupt crop growth.

"Keber II was discovered five point three years ago and joined the Federation six months later. Its technology is similar to late 20th century Earth, and some of its architecture is apparently quite advanced too." Spock turned from his console and folded his hands on the table.

Kirk addressed the assembled team, speaking seriously. "Starfleet has informed me that there has been some Klingon activity in this area." He raised his hand to silence the many voices that had broken into amazed chatter.

He continued, "We do not know why they are interested, but we must protect the Keberians and keep the peace. I know that that's a tall order, but we have managed before and we must do so again. No doubt the Organians will be keeping an eye on all parties.

"So that about wraps it up, gentlemen. We arrive in three hours and twenty eight minutes. With the added bonus of Klingons in

the area, we must all keep our wits about us."

The Enterprise reached Keber II, which looked from space as though it was one large desert, although small green areas could be seen close to the seas - well, what was left of them.

"Standard orbit, Mr. Sulu." Kirk rose from his command chair.

"Aye, sir," came the reply.

Uhura turned from her console. "It doesn't look like it'll be my favourite planet for shore leave," she said innocently. The entire bridge crew laughed.

"I have to agree with you, Uhura. I'll see what I can do." Kirk walked over to Spock's science station. "Any sign of Klingon vessels, Mr. Spock?"

"None detected, Captain."

"Admiral, we're receiving a visual signal from Keber," Uhura said, tapping her ear-receiver.

"Put it on the screen, Uhura."

The viewscreen shifted to picture an old man wearing a simple light grey overall which fitted him very loosely. The signal seemed to be interrupted for a second but then became steady again as the figure on the screen pulled a face and quickly moved to rectify his error. "Admiral Kirk?" he asked.

Kirk introduced himself and the old man continued with a smile. "My name is Tu-kar, President of the Keberian government. Forgive my inexpertise with this device." He waved his arm aimlessly over what must have been his communication console. "Welcome to our planet."

"I am honoured, sir, and look forward to meeting you in person. We will be ready to beam down in about five minutes," replied Kirk.

"I look forward to that, Admiral Kirk. See you 'til then." Tu-kar gave a slight bow and the screen reverted to its view of Keber.

"Mr. Spock, would I be right in thinking that the Keberians have yet to understand our language fully?" said Kirk quizzically.

"It would appear so, Admiral, but there is, I believe, an old Earth saying, *Practice makes perfect*," replied Spock.

"Well, Mr. Spock, let's go and give them some further practice."

As they both walked to the turbolift, Kirk turned. "Mr. Sulu, you have the con. Keep a weather eye open."

"Sir?" queried Sulu.

"Watch out for Klingons! Mr. Sulu," the Admiral instructed with a show of false exasperation, but he was smiling as he joined his

Science Officer in the turbolift.

When Kirk and Spock arrived at the transporter room they found Dr. McCoy waiting for them.

"You weren't going to forget your friendly country doctor, were you?" he said, grinning at them.

"No way, Bones," replied Kirk. "Just hope you can stand the heat."

All three stepped onto the transporter platform. "Energise," came the order. Transporter Chief Kyle complied and beamed them down to Keber.

The intense heat hit them as they materialised, but the sight which met their eyes put the temperature momentarily out of their minds. They were well placed to look over the capital of Keber. Small houses formed perfectly straight streets where many people were moving about, but the centre of their attention had to be the Keber Crystal Cathedral, which stood more than 700 feet high, dwarfing everything else in the city and which shimmered in the heat haze.

"Would you look at that!" breathed McCoy. "It's huge. How could these people have built that?"

"I am glad you are so impressed, Doctor." A voice behind them spoke. It was Tu-kar, and he was looking even older than he had done on the viewscreen. "Please come inside and feel cooler. I have some refreshments for you."

They walked slowly over to what appeared to be the government buildings which, although made of the same material as the Cathedral, were much smaller.

"We are glad you have arrived to evaluate your science team. They have much information to tell you, I understand." Kirk nodded and Spock turned to him.

"Admiral, request permission to start the evaluation."

"Permission granted, Spock. Dr. McCoy and I will stay in the city for a while."

Spock walked over the sandy ground to an oval groundcar and, as it moved away, Kirk and McCoy followed Tu-kar into the building, grateful to leave the burning sunlight.

Inside, they were met in the long, cool hallway by a Keberian woman. "Admiral Kirk, Dr. McCoy, this is my Chief Secretary, Sa-jan," Tu-kar introduced the young woman.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am." McCoy's Georgia accent had never been so pronounced. Sa-jan smiled politely and half bowed to the charming Doctor.

"Come on, McCoy, we have things to discuss," grinned Kirk and pulled the Doctor by the arm.

They all followed Tu-kar into a large meeting-room. The walls were a sandy brown colour, whilst the carpet was a beautiful light marine fabric. Against the far wall there was a communications console of an unusual design; but the most striking feature was the very large window which bathed the entire room with daylight.

The Admiral thought that with a window like that the heat in the room should have been unbearable, but there was a wonderfully cool breeze blowing gently through vents in the wall. He approached the window and looked out over the city.

"What a magnificent view of the Cathedral, Tu-kar!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," replied the President. "Would you like a cooling drink now, Admiral, also maybe your Doctor?"

They both indicated that a drink would be very welcome.

"Both of you, please to sit." Tu-kar gestured to some seats and Sa-jan sat down to Tu-kar's left after placing glasses of some cool liquid on a table near the guests.

Kirk took a sip of the drink, and found that it was a delicious fruit-based concoction. He looked at his host and spoke.

"Tu-kar, although we are here for a scientific evaluation, we have received a message from Starfleet advising us that there are Klingons in the area."

"Of course. Yes. The Klingons are an honourable race, Admiral," replied Tu-kar.

Kirk felt a slight shock run through his entire body. He had been having a little difficulty in understanding Tu-kar's strange use of language but he did not like the sound of this. Then he realised that the Federation had given no information about the Klingons to the Keberians so far, so how could Tu-kar know that the Klingons were 'an honourable race'?

"Tu-kar, have you actually met any Klingons?"

Tu-kar grimaced. "We have had the pleasurable meeting of a party of Klingons. They beamed down several weeks ago and, after searching around for a while and pushing themselves into many homes and offices, they seemed to lose interest and left. We were very glad they gone. Very honourable men!"

Admiral Kirk relaxed, and, suppressing a smile, said, "Well, with that and a few other things, I think we will be staying longer than first thought." Kirk finished his drink and looked over at the Doctor. "It has been a pleasure meeting you, Tu-kar." He rose. "Sa-jan, you too. Thank you for the refreshments."

Tu-kar led them back to the hallway. "I hope we can meet again while you still here."

"We certainly will, Tu-kar. The evaluation will take roughly one and a half days, and with your permission some of our crew could take shore leave."

Tu-kar beamed. "But of course, Admiral, let your people enjoy the delights of Keber II." And they walked out into the sunlight

once again.

Tu-kar and Sa-jan waved goodbye as Kirk and McCoy walked over to another waiting groundcar. "So, Bones, the Klingons are an 'honourable' race, are they? I look forward to the days when the Keberians have 'practised' our language a little longer! I'm guessing Tu-kar must have meant 'horrible' when he said 'honourable'."

McCoy laughed. "Well, at least we can be thankful that the Klingons didn't find anything here worth fighting over, though I wonder what they made of the Crystal Cathedral."

"Sure, I know, Klingons just love fine architecture!" Kirk grinned and then flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise here, Admiral."

"Uhura, unfortunately I am going to have to insist that shore leave be granted down to the planet."

He smiled as Uhura said, "Thanks, Admiral!" then continued,

"Send the first two shore parties down now and the next two in three hours. Kirk out."

"O.K., Bones. Let's go see this Crystal Cathedral of yours and get out of this heat." And with that he joined McCoy in the waiting groundcar.

Uhura and a fidgeting Ensign Hewitt were waiting for the rest of the first shore leave party to join them in the shuttlecraft bay.

"So where are they, Uhura?" said Hewitt impatiently.

"They'll be here soon. Be patient! Your sister warned me what you'd be like."

Two months earlier, Uhura had had a private call from an old friend who had asked her to look after her young brother Ben, who would shortly be joining the Enterprise. So he had arrived, as green as grass, and knowing only Uhura, who had taken him under her wing. He had soon made other friends among the crew and was generally well liked.

"My sister talks too much, that's her only problem," he grumbled.

"It isn't like Sulu to be late for shore leave, so I'm sure they will be along any minute," Uhura smiled.

Sure enough, Sulu and the rest of the party entered the shuttlecraft bay just as she finished speaking. "There you are, Sulu. We've waited long enough, let's get going!" said Uhura, but as they went to climb into the shuttlecraft, the lights went out.

"What the...?" cried Ben.

Uhura groped her way over to the intercom. "Scotty, there's been a power failure in the shuttlecraft bay. Can you send over an

Engineer right away?"

Scott's voice came back. "What do you mean, a power failure? There's no such word in the Enterprise's vocabulary!"

Uhura closed the intercom and turned to the rest of the group, who by then had made their way to the door. "We'll just have to use the transporter instead of taking the luxurious way down to the planet. Come on!" And she led the way down the corridor.

Meanwhile, in sickbay Dr. Chapel was treating a patient who had contracted theliogitis on Starbase 17.

"Come on, Ensign, one more hypo and you'll be fine." Then the bed monitor switched itself off. "It never rains but it pours!" she muttered. She tried to get it working again, but failed.

Nurse Coleman came running in. "Doctor, the micro-diagnostic table has shut down as I was scanning Lt. Maybri."

"What next?" Chapel said crossly and walked through to the examination room where Maybri was trying to get off the table. "Just hold it right there, Lieutenant, or you'll injure that arm again! Coleman, come and help me with Sienna." The nurse helped her lift Sienna's legs back onto the couch. "Now, let me see..."

Chapel checked the couch, but couldn't get that working either. "Nurse, call Engineering and have them send someone up to sort these tables out."

Coleman nodded and headed for the door into the outer office. The door beeped as usual, but didn't open.

"Try the other one in Dr. McCoy's office," advised Chapel, but that one didn't work either.

Chapel was getting extremely frustrated, but common-sense prevailed and she caught herself, took a deep breath and sighed in resignation. "O.K., girls, it looks like we're trapped here for a while."

In the main transporter room the shore party was still having problems. The transporter wouldn't beam anything down to the planet.

"Brilliant!" exploded Ben. "The best ship in the fleet has decided to fall apart on us!"

"Don't worry. I'll soon get it working again," said Transporter Chief Kyle from behind a panel. He started to rewire a circuit panel. Then the lights went out.

"This ship really is coming apart at the seams," said a voice in the dark.

"Shut up, Ben," commanded another.

.

Kirk and McCoy left the Crystal Cathedral and walked over towards their transport. "That was marvellous! I'm glad we came to see it, Bones."

"Yes, Jim, an amazing piece of sculpture. You really can't call it just another building," replied McCoy.

Kirk's communicator came to life. "Spock to Admiral Kirk."

"Kirk here. Go ahead, Spock."

"Admiral, the science team has found something of great interest. I believe that you should come out and see for yourself."

"We'll be right there, Spock. Kirk out."

Kirk and McCoy climbed into their ground car and set out across the sandy plains for the science encampment.

It took nearly an hour for them to reach their destination, but Spock was waiting patiently for them as they arrived. He stood at the edge of the camp which consisted of four large house units where the scientists lived and worked.

Dr. McCoy had found the journey extremely hot. "So, Spock, what's so all-fired important that we have to come all the way out here?" McCoy waved his arm to take in the great barren wastes surrounding them.

"Doctor, I perceive that you did not appreciate the scenery on your trip out here," said Spock calmly. He, personally, found he rather liked the place; it reminded him of Vulcan.

McCoy was obviously getting ready to have a good old argument with Spock. "Cut it out, both of you," Kirk intervened. "Now, Spock, what has been found that you want me to see?"

"The science team has found some very old records about Keber's past, which could possibly cause a lot of interest both here on Keber II and within the Federation." Spock turned and led them towards one of the units, where the science team was waiting.

Spock introduced Kirk and McCoy to the waiting party of scientists. "Admiral, this is Dr. Alison Halliday, the Chief Scientist."

Kirk turned on the charm and shook hands with the very beautiful Doctor. "A great pleasure to meet you, Dr. Halliday."

"Please call me Alison, Admiral Kirk," she said as they exchanged smiles.

Spock's voice dragged Kirk's attention on to the rest of the group. "These are Dr. Halliday's assistants, Doctors Simon and Beverley Cartway and Dr. Takli'doon of Alpha Centauri."

Kirk shook hands with them all and then returned to Dr. Halliday's side. "So, Doctor, tell us about these records."

Alison Halliday turned and entered the unit where she started to show Kirk pile after pile of microfiles. "This is all the data

we have so far. We discovered parts of a fairly primitive computer complex over in the San'oyan Hills. We couldn't believe it when we dated the pieces."

"And? questioned Kirk, sitting on a small stool.

"The age is roughly eighteen to twenty thousand years," answered Dr. Beverley Cartway.

McCoy whistled. "You have got to be joking... haven't you?"

"No, we are quite serious," said Dr. Simon Cartway. "And the story gets even more interesting when you read these records."

Dr. Halliday started to explain the history on the microfiles. "It seems that about twenty thousand years ago this planet was much greener, and supported two entirely different cultures. There were the scientists who were intelligent, rich and powerful and then there were the poorer, more agriculturally-minded people who cultivated the land and led a more placid life."

Dr. Takli'doon continued the report. "Apparently the scientists discovered a space anomaly near this solar system and decided to investigate it. They built a research vessel and proceeded through the anomaly.

"When they returned two months and thirteen days later, badly damaged and with several crew members dead, they reported that they had found themselves in another galaxy where there were many new planets to explore, but many dangers too."

Dr. Halliday took over again. "The scientists decided to move on to this new galaxy, accepting the risks and making plans on how to defend themselves. Apparently Keber, at that time, was over-populated, over-polluted, etc., so they felt no compunction at leaving their homes and starting anew. So, over a period of years, they built several generation ships and made ready to leave."

Dr. Simon Cartway took over again. "Unfortunately, during the intervening time, the enemy which had attacked the Keberians' research vessel in the new galaxy found the anomaly and followed them through. There were many attacks on the planet, which resulted in the destruction of most of the buildings."

"The Crystal Cathedral and a few of the government buildings are the only constructions left from that period," interjected Dr. Takli'doon. "It must have been an amazing city when it was at its prime, and it's a shame that none of the records we have found show any visuals of it."

"Indeed," said Spock, "that is most unfortunate."

Admiral Kirk was engrossed by the whole story. "What happened to the scientists here on the planet?"

"There are no records to show much of what happened next," Dr. Halliday answered, "but it doesn't seem likely that they would survive. Indeed, they could have taken flight in their generation ships but I doubt that they would have gone back through the anomaly as their enemy would only have followed them back. As for that enemy, they must have gone back anyway."

Dr. Beverley Cartway interrupted. "Of course, since there is

still a population here on Keber II, then it is possible that everyone left alive after those attacks, both the scientific and the agriculturally based people, had to group together in order to survive."

"Yes, that would be a more logical conclusion," agreed Mr. Spock.

"So you see, Admiral Kirk, we think that the Federation should be informed of this immediately and a larger research party be set up to investigate all the many facets of this discovery." Dr. Halliday finished and looked at Admiral Kirk as if trying to gauge his reaction to the story.

"Of course, Admiral, there is something else to consider." Spock looked even more serious than usual.

"What, in particular, Mr. Spock?" Kirk turned to him.

"We must advise Starfleet and the Federation of the space anomaly. Although it does not show up on our scanners now and Keber II obviously has not been attacked within at least several of its last few centuries, and probably not since these original attacks we have just been told of, it does not mean that it will never occur again. I would recommend that we advise Starfleet of the necessity of at least an observation post here on Keber II - if not a full, well defended Starbase."

Admiral Kirk was not the only one stunned speechless.

Meanwhile, back on the best ship in the fleet, things were going from bad to worse. One by one the Enterprise was losing its systems.

Engineer Calin was the one to trace the fault in the end. He found Mr. Scott under the transporter console and explained his theory at once.

"When that initial transmission came up from the planet there was another signal on the same carrier wave. I would guess that it was accidental as Commander Uhura does confirm that the President did not appear to be very expert at using his communications console. Anyway, this extra signal was from a computer which was quite alien to ours and when it could not complete a hook-up with ours it started to hunt about and search for a compatible system."

Scott nodded encouragingly, and Calin continued. "The end result is that every system it searched was affected by its manner of contact and that caused the subsequent shutdowns."

Mr. Scott looked thoughtfully at the young man. "Aye, lad, that does at least seem possible. So if we shut down every system and then reload the protected master systems again, then we should wipe out the alien program altogether." He slapped Calin on the back. "Let's give it a go."

The Enterprise was moving gracefully in orbit when the ship's power was turned off and, forty seconds later when the power came back on line after the complete rerun of the ship's master system,

was once again the USS Enterprise, the best ship in the Fleet.

"All decks reporting back to normal, Sulu," called Uhura.

"Thank you," replied the acting commanding officer, and the bridge crew was at last able to relax. The Admiral would not have been pleased to find his Enterprise in less than perfect working order!

Down in Engineering Scott turned away from the intercom.

"Mr. Calin, that was the bridge. They report all systems working normally." He put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "You have the makings of a fine engineer, lad." Calin's face turned rose-red as Scott beamed at him. "I think it's time for you to be introduced to one of the best traditions of any engineering department. Come along to my quarters and try some real Scotch whisky!" They walked towards the door deep in a conversation covering the many exotic intoxicating liquors to be found on various shore leave planets.

In the science encampment, Admiral Kirk was staring at Spock.

"I see what you mean, Spock." He pulled himself together. "I agree that we should make such a recommendation, and the sooner the better."

He rose and turned to the rest of the the group. "We shall take this data back to the Enterprise now, and deliver your reports to Starbase 14 immediately, as you requested. I imagine you will be inundated soon with visitors - research teams and the like." And with that they all left the unit and walked outside.

He shook hands again with the scientist group. Dr. Halliday smiled at him. "I hope the Enterprise will be one of those visitors, Admiral."

Kirk held her hand a little longer than necessary and looked deep into her eyes. "I hope so too. There are many aspects of Keber II that I would like to get to know a lot more about."

Admiral Kirk turned, to find the good Doctor watching him with a wry smile on his face and Mr. Spock intently inspecting the horizon, his arms full of the data files.

He moved towards them and said, "Gentlemen, we should stop wasting time. We should get back to the ship immediately." His expression lightened as McCoy's eyes widened and he started to splutter, "We're wasting time?! Of all the...!"

"Not now, Bones." Kirk opened his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

"Go ahead, Admiral," came Uhura's voice.

"Recall all shore parties and prepare to leave orbit."

"Aye, sir."

"Three to beam up." And with that the science team watched the Admiral, the Doctor and the Vulcan disappearing in three sparkling columns of light.

The three men made their way to the bridge. Uhura called Dr. McCoy to her console and obviously began to relay some message.

Kirk looked round the bridge. "That started out as a Klingon scare and ended up a horse of a different colour," he said, looking at Mr. Spock who did not rise to the bait this time but walked over to his science station instead.

Being denied any reaction he turned to Uhura and said, "I hope you enjoyed the shore leave you didn't want, Uhura."

She sat looking stunned, but before she could answer and tell him all about her so-called shore leave, he had taken his seat and turned to Mr. Scott who was hovering nearby. "Ahh, Mr. Scott, everything O.K. with the ship? Good, good."

Scott had opened his mouth to explain the trials he had been through but again Kirk had turned away and was asking Uhura to put her through to Tu-kar.

"Aye, sir," she fumed as she adjusted her ear-piece. Admirals!

Kirk spoke quickly to the President and explained that the Enterprise was leaving but would be returning to Keber II as soon as possible. Tu-kar said goodbye and Kirk turned his attention back to his bridge crew.

He smiled and said, "Mr. Chekov, plot a course for Starbase 14."

"Aye, sir, plotted and laid in," replied Chekov.

"Mr. Sulu, engage. Warp 6."

As the Enterprise left orbit Dr. McCoy came to Kirk's shoulder. "Seems Chapel needs my calming bedside manner. So if you need me I'll be in sickbay for a while." He climbed the steps to the turbolift. "I don't know why it is, but every time I leave the ship sickbay seems to have a crisis."

Kirk laughed and turned to watch the Doctor leave. He then turned again to Uhura. "I'll be wanting to send a report to Starfleet Command shortly, Commander."

"Aye, sir," acknowledged Uhura.

Now that business had been taken care of, Kirk relented on the obviously agitated Mr. Scott. "Now tell me, Mr. Scott, what has been happening while I was away?"

This time, Scott took a deep breath and began. "Well, Admiral, you see, there was this alien computer on yon planet..."

As Scott gave the Admiral his report, Uhura, Chekov and Sulu were not disappointed at the range of expressions playing across

Kirk's face as he tried to follow the story.

Then they caught each other's eyes and Admiral Kirk could have sworn that someone *giggled* on his bridge!



MOTHER HORTA

There she lived in peace,
Deep below the planet's surface,
The last of her kind,
Watching over all that remained of her race -
Eggs.
Soon they would hatch,
And the young would look to her for guidance,
For she was to be the mother of her race.

Then one day, man, in search of pergium,
Unknowingly broke into her nursery.
Until then she had been quite happy to share the planet,
But now they threatened her young.
Already some of the eggs would never hatch,
And others had been stolen -
Collected as oddities by these strange beings.
Like any mother whose young are threatened,
She fought back.
That this meant killing saddened her,
For she was a peaceful being,
But, for the safety of her unborn children,
It must be done.

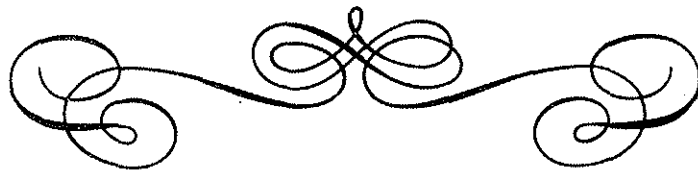
Still they did not go.
Instead, more strangers came,
And these wore some kind of uniform.
They, too, started to search for her,
But she could move faster than they,
For she could tunnel through the rock.
While these men were looking for her,
She stole part of their power plant,
Knowing that now they would have to leave,
For without the stolen part it would explode.
But still they searched.

Then one of them injured her,
But she managed to escape by tunnelling through the rock.
Still they followed her,
Cornering her in a room.
One of the new strangers was different from the rest -
He had pointed ears,
And it was this one who put his hand out to touch her.
She found that she could hear him in her mind:
They wanted the stolen part,
And they wanted to know who she was

And why she was killing the miners.
 She had nothing to lose -
 So she told them everything.

To her surprise, they offered to help her;
 They brought a doctor to heal her wound,
 And when the miners came, they defended her.
 When everyone had calmed down, all was explained,
 And a compromise was reached;
 She and her young could tunnel as much as they liked,
 And the miners would remove the precious metals and ores,
 Each side leaving the other alone.
 The compromise was accepted and worked,
 And the uniformed strangers left.
 But the mother Horta would never forget those strangers,
 For they had helped save her and her young,
 And she would always remember them.

Christine J Jones



THE TRAVELLER'S SONG

We sail on a sea of stars,
 In a ship of silver-white.
 Our journeys are many and varied;
 So many planets have we visited,
 So many beings have we met.

We tell those we meet of our Federation;
 Of the many and varied beings in it,
 Who have joined together to help one another,
 And we offer them membership, if they so wish it.
 The choice is theirs.

If they need help, we assist them,
 If they permit it, then we learn what we can of them -
 Their beliefs, customs, traditions,
 Their hopes and dreams.
 Their way of life.

We feel privileged in making contact with new civilisations;
 Learning about them, teaching them about us.
 For learning about people can bring understanding,
 And from understanding can grow friendship.
 And we enjoy making new friends.

So on we travel on our sea of stars,
 In our ship of silver-white.
 We travel great distances through space,
 In our search for new beings to call friends -
 So the traveller's song will go on without end.

Christine J Jones



INCIDENT

by

Teresa Abbott

A vast similitude interlocks all,
All distances of place however wide,
All distances of time,
All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different,
All nations, all identities that have existed or may exist,
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spanned,
And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.

Walt Whitman
(from: "A Sea Symphony")

The Ruani Warrior Prince strode purposefully through the forest, picking his way carefully over the rocks and debris in his way. He was humanoid in appearance, scarcely more than a metre tall, and yet he carried himself with the dignity of one twice his height.

It was a bleak, inhospitable world. The intricately embroidered cloak the Warrior had on did little to insulate him against the ever present damp and cold. The path ahead twisted and turned over the foothills, with pools of ice-encrusted mud making the going slippery and dangerous.

On either side of the path, what passed for trees on Ruani stretched their spindly branches upwards towards a distant sun that never gave enough warmth. Yet the humanoid seemed oblivious of the perpetual twilight and silence. No bird or animal would venture into these forests. Only the occasional firefly flickered silently amongst the branches.

Lt. Spock walked quietly some hundred metres or so behind the Warrior, and found that he was surprisingly content. He had little difficulty in matching the smaller humanoid's speed, and found that he could both keep an eye on the Prince and think at the same time, with little difficulty.

Ruani could not have been more different from his home world, and yet he felt strangely at peace here. The heavy woven overcoat with which the natives had provided him kept the cold and damp away admirably, and even his Vulcan metabolism, used to much warmer conditions, was not adversely affected.

Ruani was cold, damp, bleak, in neverending twilight from its distant sun and three moons.

Vulcan was hot, dry, multicoloured and bright.

Yet the similarities between the two worlds struck Spock more than the differences.

The Ruani people, like the Vulcans, had developed a high level

of mental power and self-discipline. They, too, believed in the value of each individual and race. Since his arrival here, Spock had been treated with a polite distance that came as a welcome relief after the months in space on a Human ship.

With a sigh, Spock realised that he had come back again to the root of his problem.

The pressure from Vulcan to return home was growing ever greater. His father, Sarek, had never contacted him directly during the years since Spock had left the planet. Nevertheless, family and acquaintances had made it very clear that now would be considered a good time to return home.

Spock couldn't face going back, knowing that he had not yet come to terms with himself enough to do so. But was the alternative any better?

His first tour of duty was over. When this mission was completed, he had orders to report to the USS Enterprise, under the command of Captain Christopher Pike. Logically, he should be pleased with the appointment. But emotionally?

Even to admit that there were emotional problems would mean failing before he had begun. It was up to him to master the treacherous feelings of hurt and rejection that he had felt so often in his dealings with Humans.

Here on Ruani, there was no pressure on him to conform. He was neither Vulcan nor Human. He was simply Spock, and accepted as such. Hopefully, the breathing space this mission gave him would enable him to decide whether to return to Vulcan or remain in Starfleet.

As he followed the Warrior Prince, watching for any signs of ambush, he was ashamed to realise that he desperately needed the change of scene.

Lt. James T. Kirk crouched in the bushes and watched the two men approach. He had on a thick jacket over his uniform to protect against the cold and damp, but the hand that held the phaser was still sticky with perspiration, and he tried to clamp down on his growing unease.

Nervously, he shifted position a little, careful not to disturb the undergrowth, knowing that any slight sound would carry clearly through the thin air of the valley and alert those he was watching.

He risked a quick glance at his companion. Cdr. Ruddell knelt beside him only a few feet away, but showed none of the nervousness of the younger man. The Commander's eyes glinted with a fierce anticipation as he watched the men below heading towards their ambush. Kirk's heart sank as he wondered yet again how he had come to be in this situation.

Just 24 hours ago he would have classed himself as one of the happiest men alive. Newly out of the Academy, just recently having been appointed to the USS Farragut under the command of his lifelong hero, Captain Garrovick, he had felt privileged just to be on the Starship, even though most of his duties were minor ones.

Obviously he'd wanted to go down to one of the planets they visited - the survey he'd done as part of his training had certainly whetted his appetite - but everyone had to take their turn, and being one of the latest additions to the crew, he hadn't expected his name to come up for some time.

Cdr. Ruddell had come aboard in a shuttlecraft they had picked up in Quadrant 11. He was, or so he said, on an urgent mission for the Federation. A tall, thickset, swarthy man, he had with him a clutch of sealed orders and requests. There was widespread speculation on board the ship as to the reason for his visit. All anyone knew for sure was that shortly after his arrival the ship had changed course for Ruani 8, and Captain Garrovick and the Commander had spent several hours closeted together in one of the briefing rooms.

On arriving at Ruani 8, Kirk was surprised to hear his name called to the hangar deck. The Captain and Commander were waiting for him next to one of the shuttlecraft.

"Lieutenant, you're to accompany the Commander on a short visit to the planet below. Cdr. Ruddell will brief you on the way down, and you're to follow his orders. I'm sorry for the suddenness of all this, but speed is essential. You'll find all the clothing and equipment you'll need in the shuttlecraft."

Kirk hoped his surprise didn't show too clearly.

"Yes, sir."

He felt the Commander's eyes on him, appraising him, and climbed quickly aboard the waiting craft, wondering why he had been the one selected. A few minutes later, they were on their way.

What he couldn't have known was that Captain Garrovick was unhappy about the entire situation. He had checked and rechecked the Commander's credentials, but they were a long way out from Starfleet and it was difficult to do a proper security check. He had finally agreed to give the Commander a shuttlecraft on condition that someone from his own crew accompany him.

He had selected Kirk because he knew that the young man showed strong independent thought, and he wanted to send someone who would use his initiative and not be easily led.

He was very aware that if his suspicions proved correct he might be sending the young Lieutenant into danger.

Ruani 8 was a long way out from its sun, and as such it was doomed to spend an eternity spinning just out of reach of the warmth it needed. Its three moons cast a continual glow over the surface, so that the planet was never in darkness but seemed to shift through several shades of twilight. The plant life was plentiful and resilient, and the strange growths which thrived in the perpetual cold and half-light covered much of the planet surface.

The Ruani were small, humanoid, very hardy because of the adverse climatic conditions, and steeped in strange customs and traditions that had enabled them to survive the hostile environment. They had been contacted by the Federation some years previously, and though not yet members as they had no space-flight

capability, the Federation endeavoured to keep on good terms with them.

Once every ten years a new leader was chosen. Before he could be accepted by the people, he would take an offering through the forests to the Ruani temple, a vast, underground complex whose location was only known to the Ruling Family. Legend had it that the temple was filled with precious stones, thrown up in the caves by ancient volcanic eruptions. All anyone knew for sure was that unless the ruler elect returned with a stone of great worth, he would not be accepted by his people.

Cdr. Ruddell had apparently received news that such a pilgrimage was to take place this very week. Unfortunately, it would seem that others had also heard of the journey, and were planning to ambush the ruler elect and steal the stone. Such an act would cause grave instability in the Ruani system.

Because the Ruani had forbidden the use of transporters on their planet, believing them to unnaturally destroy the body's systems, they would have to use the shuttlecraft and proceed with great secrecy. The Farragut would leave orbit for several hours to allow them to complete their mission, and then come back to retrieve them. In case of any difficulty they could not use their communicators, but would have to be located by means of subcutaneous transponders.

It all sounded very plausible and correct. Why, then, did Kirk feel ill at ease and unable to shake off his innate dislike of the Commander?

"Now! Fire on heavy stun!" Ruddell's harsh whisper cut through Kirk's reverie.

"But they're unarmed! We could take them without force."

"That's an order, Lieutenant." The Commander set his phaser. "I'll take the Prince and you take the man following him."

Kirk swallowed convulsively. The whole thing felt wrong. And yet there were no logical grounds for his unease; the stranger following the Prince might indeed be a spy and an enemy of the Federation.

Enemy or no, he couldn't bring himself to unnecessarily harm the man. He set his phaser to Stun 1 and fired simultaneously with the Commander. The two forms in the clearing below crumpled and fell to the ground without a sound. Feeling slightly sickened, Kirk followed as the Commander ran into the clearing and checked the fallen figures.

"Still alive." To Kirk, Ruddell's voice sounded almost regretful. "Tie them up, Kirk, where we can see them while I make a fire."

Kirk was dismayed. "Is that really necessary? The stun will keep them out for hours. And surely you don't mean to restrain the Prince as well?"

"Must you continually question my orders?" The Commander could scarcely contain his anger. "Do as I tell you."

Reluctantly, Kirk dragged the two figures towards some rocks and tied their ankles and wrists securely, but not so tightly that the circulation would be impeded. They both seemed to be breathing normally, although Kirk guessed it would be some time before they regained consciousness. Despite the fact that the stranger he had hit had been affected less severely than the Ruani, he still breathed shallowly and his skin felt hot to the touch. Not knowing anything about the alien's metabolism, Kirk didn't know whether to be worried or not.

Returning to the campfire, Kirk found the Commander examining a large, emerald-green coloured stone in the shadows of the flames. The size of a small egg, it caught the light and threw it to the corners of the clearing, beautiful in its simplicity.

He crouched down opposite the Commander. "The stone is safe, then. What do you intend to do now, sir?"

"I intend to see that it remains safe." The Commander stood up abruptly. "Keep an eye on them. I'm going for a walk."

Kirk wanted to ask where and why, but felt uneasy questioning such a high-ranking officer. The obedience he had pledged to the Service weighed heavily on his shoulders.

The Commander vanished into the forest, leaving Kirk to muse alone by the fire. It would be at least a couple of hours before the Farragut could contact them through the shuttlecraft, and the Lieutenant admitted to himself that he would be glad of Captain Garrovick's return.

Turning, he was surprised and startled to find the tall stranger observing him across the clearing. The dark eyes met his, and Kirk could see no animosity in them, only a wary curiosity.

Getting up, he grabbed a water bottle and crossed the clearing, where he bent down next to the alien.

"Drink?" He couldn't be sure if the other would understand him, but proffered the flask, hoping to make his intention clear.

The stranger's eyes watched him from beneath slanting eyebrows, seeming to look right through him, weighing him up, and making the Lieutenant very disconcerted. When the prisoner finally spoke, it was in precise, clipped tones, in perfect Federation Standard.

"You are a Starfleet officer?"

"Yes." Kirk was taken aback by the unexpected question. "Lt. Jim Kirk of the USS Farragut." He wondered whether he should have volunteered the information.

"Why, then, did you attack us?"

Even more troubled, Kirk stood and regarded the alien at his feet. This man was not what he had expected at all.

"We attacked you because you were going to steal the stone, and we're here to protect the Prince and his property."

The stranger raised an eyebrow. "Indeed. I think you are mistaken. I am a Vulcan and was sent here as you were, to try to prevent the theft of the stone by a suspected Federation traitor."

Kirk regarded the prisoner with disbelief. A Vulcan? It had to be a lie! Vulcans were allies of the Federation, not their enemies. Why would Ruddell tell him deliberate lies, unless....

Abruptly Kirk reached down and pushed back the heavy hood that covered the prisoner's head. Even in the inadequate light the stranger's Vulcan origins were obvious.

Confused, Kirk turned away and headed back for the fire. The alien's voice followed him persistently and quietly. "If your companion steals the stone, the whole Ruani system will be rendered unstable, and prove a possible threat to Federation security."

"Be quiet!" It was all happening too fast, the implications too enormous to take in. Kirk was immensely relieved to hear Ruddell returning, and stood up eagerly to greet him.

But he kept the stranger's revelations to himself.

The Commander seemed restless and on edge. He prowled the clearing, ignoring Kirk, stopping only to check the helpless forms of the prisoners. The Lieutenant noticed that the Vulcan feigned unconsciousness, and wondered why he couldn't bring himself to betray him.

Finally, the Commander stopped his pacing and looked at Kirk, an unfathomable expression in his eyes.

"Lieutenant, I think you should return to the shuttlecraft and await the Farragut's signal."

A chill crept up Kirk's back. He felt strangely reluctant to leave the prisoners alone with the Commander, but couldn't think of any valid reason for refusing to go.

Picking up his phaser, he crossed the clearing to head for the forest. As he passed the prisoners, he noticed the alien observing him, a strange look in his eyes which Kirk couldn't place. Deeply troubled, he quickened his pace and headed into the forest.

Pushing through the branches, he was oblivious of the obstacles in his way, his mind feverishly analysing the last couple of hours. What was that look in the stranger's eyes? It came closest to... despair? A plea for help? Could the man really be a Vulcan, and Ruddell, a Federation traitor?

And why had the Commander sent him back to the shuttlecraft unless he meant to steal the stone in the Lieutenant's absence?

Suspicion and intuition came together, and realisation hit Kirk with a blinding flash. If the Commander were indeed a traitor, he would have to kill the prisoners to dispose of any witnesses against him. The Vulcan had known, and it was an acceptance of fate that Kirk had seen in his eyes.

Frantically, he headed back for the clearing, pulling his phaser out ready and setting it this time to kill. With a sickening sensation he heard the distant whine of some unknown weapon, and knew then that his suspicions were a horrifying reality.

Bursting into the clearing, his appalled mind took in the devastation. The Ruani Prince was dead, burned beyond recognition, and the Commander's weapon was levelling onto the Vulcan.

"No!" Kirk's shout startled Ruddell, and brought the beam to bear on himself. Kirk threw himself sideways as the blast hit, the edge of the rays searing his side with blinding agony. But he was firing as he fell and the Commander collapsed to the ground.

A silence descended on the clearing, the reassuring crackle of the fire lessening the horror of the scene around it.

Kirk rolled up tight into a ball, clutching his pain to himself, biting his lip to keep himself from crying out and showing weakness before the alien, grateful that the one person left alive couldn't see him where he had fallen.

After what seemed like an eternity, the alien's quiet voice carried through the clearing.

"Lieutenant, are you hurt?"

"I'm all right." It cost Kirk dearly to say that in a normal voice. It struck him that the two of them were alone, and that he had killed his commanding officer. The world was crumbling around him and the pain threatened to overwhelm him, but he would remain in control.

After several minutes he regained command of himself sufficiently to stand up. Pulling his coat around himself he fastened it tight to conceal the injury and to support the pain. Only then did he make his way to the remaining prisoner.

"I'm sorry that the Prince has been killed. I never meant for this to happen."

The Vulcan returned his gaze without expression. "What do you intend to do?"

Kirk hesitated. He hadn't yet had time to come to terms with all that had happened, let alone to make a positive plan. What he wanted to do most of all was to sit down and rest, and maybe find a way to ease his injury and stop his surroundings from wavering so alarmingly. Also, the Prince's body should be guarded and the Ruani people informed of the traitor's death. Surely it would be best to wait here in the clearing until help arrived.

Spock saw the uncertainty in the Lieutenant's face and wondered if he had misjudged the man. He spoke forcefully, not knowing Humans well enough to recognise the carefully concealed signs of suffering.

"If you are indeed a Starfleet officer, it is your duty to return the stone to the Ruani temple at once. Each minute it is away from its proper place increases the risk to the inhabitants of this planet."

Kirk stared at him. The way he felt at the moment he doubted very much that he could even walk, let alone accomplish such a task.

"Why? The stone is safe here. When my shipmates arrive and have seen to the bodies, then we can inform the Ruani..."

Spock cut him off impatiently. "Surely the importance of the stone has been explained to you. In itself it is of little value. Precious stones like this one are easily manufactured elsewhere in the Galaxy. Its value lies solely in its symbolic significance."

Every ten years the Ancients of the Ruani race select a stone and focus on it telepathically. If the Prince Elect can locate the correct stone in the Temple he is judged to be in tune with the people and worthy of their obedience. There are many dissenting factions who would make much of the fact that the stone had slipped from the Ruling Family's control and was missing from the temple. And there are many other races who are waiting to move in on this planet on just such an opportunity. The Prince's death is regrettable, but the race will elect another ruler. The loss of the stone would have far more serious consequences."

The Vulcan's words dismayed Kirk. Could it really be possible that the future of the Ruani people had fallen into his hands? If so, then he would find the energy for the task from somewhere. There was, however, a problem.

"I don't know where the temple is." Kirk studied the thin face intently, and trusting to instinct, made a decision. "You're going to have to show me the way. If I untie you, will you give me your word to take me there?"

The Vulcan nodded his acceptance, relieved that the Lieutenant had finally grasped the seriousness of the situation. "I give you my word that I will take you as far as I can."

Hastily, Kirk untied the alien's hands and feet, and motioned for him to rise. The prisoner rose stiffly, then moved to retrieve the stone from where it had fallen by the fire. Straightening up, he turned to Kirk and found the phaser still levelled at him.

"Lieutenant, I gave you my word. We are on the same side. I cannot at this time furnish you with proof, but I am a Vulcan, and as such cannot lie."

Slowly, Kirk lowered the phaser. In reality, he knew there was little he could do in his condition to defend himself against the Vulcan's superior strength, but would not let the stranger see how hurt he was.

"You lead, I'll follow. Vulcan or not, if you try anything, I'll kill you."

Spock's eyebrows rose appraisingly. Then turning, he made his way into the forest.

The next couple of hours passed in a blur for Kirk. The Vulcan set a killing pace, striding unhampered over the rocks and through the undergrowth. All Kirk was aware of was the throbbing in his side, and the need to keep up with the stranger. The cold and damp were a welcome relief, as his skin felt as though it was burning, and he hugged his coat ever tighter about himself to try and stop the agony from his wound.

He could no longer explain clearly to himself what he was doing. Events had moved too fast for him to analyse the situation rationally, and he moved with blind instinct.

It was possible that his career would be destroyed over this, and his anxiety to see the stone safely returned was all that was left to him. He didn't want the Ruani people to suffer or Federation security to be endangered because of his actions.

But the time came when he fell and could not get up. He opened his eyes to find the stranger crouched next to him, regarding him with dark, troubled eyes.

"Why did you not inform me that you were hurt? It is illogical to attempt to walk in your condition."

Kirk managed a weak smile. "It's highly logical when you don't know the exact nature of your companion. How far is it now to the temple?"

The Vulcan helped Kirk to sit up and rested him against some rocks. "It is too far for you to go. I will take the stone myself. The temple's location is secret, and no-one except the Ruani are supposed to know how to find the entrance. Even if you were well, I could not have allowed you to accompany me on the final stage. I did not give my word to take you all the way. Now rest here 'til I return."

He hesitated, seeing the barely suppressed pain and fear in the injured man's eyes. Briefly he considered rendering the Lieutenant unconscious, then rejected the idea, feeling it would leave Kirk vulnerable to attack. Better that he be awake and aware of his surroundings.

"I will." He said it gently, hoping to reassure his companion. Then turning, he set off at a run for the temple.

Kirk watched him go with something close to despair. He had never felt more helpless or less in control of the situation. By now the Farragut should be in orbit around the planet. Since transporters were forbidden, they would have to send another shuttlecraft, then follow his transponder signal to this clearing. By the time they arrived, the Vulcan could be long gone, and the stone with him.

He hoped that he had judged the stranger correctly, and that the Vulcan would do as he had promised. Kirk had sensed the intelligence and strength of character in the Vulcan, and had been strangely drawn to trust him. But were his instincts good in his present weakened state? If the Vulcan did not come back, Kirk doubted if he would survive the couple of hours until help arrived without some form of medical attention and water.

Acute thirst was heightening his discomfort. Carefully he loosened his clothing to examine the wound. The cloth had dried into the blood and would not be moved. Leaning back against the rocks he silently endured the pain-filled minutes, until finally he lapsed into merciful unconsciousness.

Spock arrived at the entrance to the Ruani Temple within minutes. The entrance was concealed in the undergrowth, and passing through the narrow opening he found himself again in the vast inner chamber. It was difficult to believe that it was only a few short hours ago that he had been there before with the Ruani Prince.

Carefully, almost reverently, he placed the sacred stone in the niche in which they had found it. Then he was back out in the forest, not even pausing to admire the splendour of the ancient underground caverns.

Concern for the injured man he had left behind gnawed at him, and he was surprised to realise that it had been a long time since he had felt such worry over another being. Although the Lieutenant had acted in a logical manner in his attempt to deflect the Commander's fire, Spock knew that most Humans would not have risked their lives so readily for that of a comparative stranger. He had been loathe to leave the Lieutenant, but reasoned that the man could not have been too badly hurt, or he would never have managed to follow Spock so far.

He wondered momentarily whether he should have checked the injury before proceeding to the temple, then decided that he had made the logical decision. They were both Starfleet officers, and their primary concern must be for the safety of these people and for the Federation. Injury or no, duty would have to come first.

He was troubled by the younger man's presence. The Ruani were a highly secretive race. They had accepted Vulcan's help in this instance on the strict understanding that no record or witnesses to the pilgrimage would be allowed to remain. His own memories of the temple's location could be erased by the Vulcan Elders. The Lieutenant posed a different problem. According to the rules of the agreement the Ruani had drawn up with the Vulcans, any outsider who found out about the temple location would also have to be disposed of. Kirk did not know the exact location, but would that satisfy the Ruani? Spock owed his life to the injured man, and did not wish him to come to any harm.

Arriving back at the clearing, Spock found Kirk slumped unconscious on the ground at the foot of the rocks. Gently turning him over, he saw for the first time the full extent of the injury, and wondered that Kirk had managed to endure it for so long. There was no time for self-recrimination or regret. Hastily, he set to work.

The first thing Kirk was aware of was the crackling of the fire, and he regained consciousness to a pleasant sense of wellbeing. For a moment he was disorientated and couldn't remember where he was. Then the characteristic twilight of Ruani brought the memories flooding back. He realised that he was lying propped up against the rocks, with the Vulcan's thick cloak around him, and his side tightly bandaged.

The pain was still there, but bearable. In fact, he marvelled at how little it hurt him. Perhaps the injury was not as serious as he had begun to suspect.

The Vulcan was moving about the clearing, and Kirk watched the silent figure in the firelight, the dark eyes reflecting the flames, and the long fingers restacking the pile of logs. Realisation and gratitude came both at once, and he spoke without thinking.

"It seems you really are who you say you are. I'm grateful that you came back for me."

Spock turned to face him, surprised that Kirk was awake so soon. "I'm sorry. I should not have left you alone. I didn't realise how seriously you were wounded." He hesitated. "My name is Spock. I am in fact a Starfleet officer like yourself."

Kirk shifted position slightly, trying to find one that pained him less. "I think you owe me an explanation, Spock."

The Vulcan turned back to the fire, and stood for a moment, thoughtfully watching the flames. It could do no harm to explain the situation, especially in view of his orders and what he had decided he would have to do.

The young man was obviously weakening. Spock had imposed a light block on his mind to deaden the pain, so that Kirk would not know the full extent of his injury, but he reasoned that the Lieutenant would soon begin to suspect his growing weakness. Talking would help to take his mind off things and pass the time while they waited for help to arrive.

Spock was usually ill at ease with Humans, but felt no awkwardness with this man who had saved his life.

"The Vulcans were the first people to contact the Ruani people several years ago, and as such, feel a special responsibility for their continual wellbeing. When the Ruani received word that someone in the Federation was planning to steal the sacred stone, the Ruling Family asked the Vulcans for help.

"My father, being the Vulcan Ambassador, agreed to send someone to accompany the Prince Elect on his journey, both to protect the stone, and to see that he did not come to any harm. Knowing that I was between missions, he suggested me. In this respect, as in others, I have failed him.

"Because it is absolutely forbidden that anyone apart from the Ruani knows the whereabouts of the temple, the Vulcan government pledged that no record of their help, or of any incident that might arise as a result of it, would remain."

"I see." Kirk felt the prickling of fear, knowing that he was powerless to defend himself against any attack. He could not believe that after all that had passed between them, the Vulcan meant to kill him.

Deliberately, he changed the subject. "What ship are you on, Spock? Or do you usually work on these underground missions?"

Spock sat down next to the fire. "I am between assignments. My father disapproves of my being in Starfleet, and I think he hoped that by recommending me for this particular situation, I would rethink my decision and return to Vulcan. If I choose to remain in Starfleet, I have been assigned as Second Officer to the USS Enterprise."

"The Enterprise!" Kirk couldn't keep the envy from his voice. "That's Pike's new ship, isn't it? How can going back to Vulcan compete with exploring space in the Enterprise?"

"You are probably correct." As Spock stood up again, he realised it was true. At heart, there had never been a decision to make. He couldn't explain why he said the next words. "I am not, however, totally Vulcan. I am half Human."

He turned slowly towards Kirk, bracing himself against the expected comments, wondering why he hoped so desperately not to hear them, not this time, not from this man.

But the Lieutenant had either not heard him, or genuinely didn't care, and was talking about something else.

"In fifteen years time, I intend to have a ship of my own."

"Indeed!" The Vulcan's eyes rose speculatively. *In view of the Lieutenant's youth it seemed highly unlikely that he would be Captain of a starship at so young an age.* Yet Spock sensed the immense determination in Kirk's voice, and experienced a momentary regret that he would never know if his prediction came true.

Involuntarily he looked ahead his own fifteen years, and despite his Vulcan control he shuddered. In fifteen years time, he knew that Pon Farr would have passed him over one way or another. He would either be dead, fighting the pull of T'Pring's bond, or joined to her, probably on Vulcan. Either way there was no escape. He knew of only one or two Vulcans in history who had successfully overcome their bonding, and it was always because of an intense commitment to an outside cause. He doubted that he would have the good fortune to find such a commitment. Illogical to worry about the future, and yet....

Kirk saw the shadow pass over Spock's face, and wondered. He had sensed the Vulcan's bitterness and withdrawal when he had spoken of his mixed heritage, and felt immensely saddened that this man had been hurt so much in the past.

If he was so vulnerable now, how would he be in five, or even ten years time? Would there be anybody there to help him and draw him out, and make the effort to see through to his inner values? He spoke impulsively, offering his friendship.

"We should keep in touch when all this is over. It would be a shame to lose contact. Space is all very well, but it's nice to have friends... "

Yet at the mention of friendship the Vulcan turned away from him abruptly, and rising, moved into the shadows at the edge of the clearing.

Kirk wondered what he had said to upset the alien. After several minutes, he spoke to break the silence. "What will you do now? You must have a rendezvous arranged."

"A ship is to pick me up at planet dawn. Until then I will remain with you." He forestalled the younger man's protest. "I owe you my life. I cannot leave you here alone."

Kirk considered the Vulcan carefully. The smaller moon was on the wane and it was only a matter of about an Earth hour before the sun came over the horizon.

"I'm sure my shipmates will be here soon. You must go to your ship. I'll be fine until they arrive. Please, I don't want you to make any sacrifices for me." He spoke carefully, trying to keep his voice steady, but knew that his weakened body betrayed him.

The Vulcan considered. It was probably safe to leave now, for the Starfleet crew had had plenty of time to locate their position. "Very well." Carefully, he made his way around the fire, and sat on the ledge next to the injured man.

"Jim." It was the first time he had used the man's given name, and it sat strangely on his lips. "I have already explained that I have orders to make you forget." He caught the quickly suppressed fear in the pain filled eyes, and inwardly berated himself for his

choice of words.

"I give you my word I will do you no harm. It simply requires that I touch your mind, and erase the memory of our meeting. Normally such a thing is against our Vulcan ethics. In this case, we have pledged our word to the Ruani. And it is for the best. If you do not remember what has happened you cannot be blamed for it, and your career will not be affected. I will explain to the Ruani and to Starfleet all that has happened, and what I have done. Records will show that you were found suffering from a severe injury and a memory blackout. The Ruani will be satisfied that the temple's location and the stone are safe, and will take no further action once they are convinced of the Federation traitor's death. It really is the only way."

The hazel eyes regarded him strangely. "And you, Spock? Who will erase your memories?"

"The Vulcan Elders will see to it when I return home." He could not conceal his distaste at the prospect. Yet he had agreed to it at the outset of the mission, before he had known what would happen.

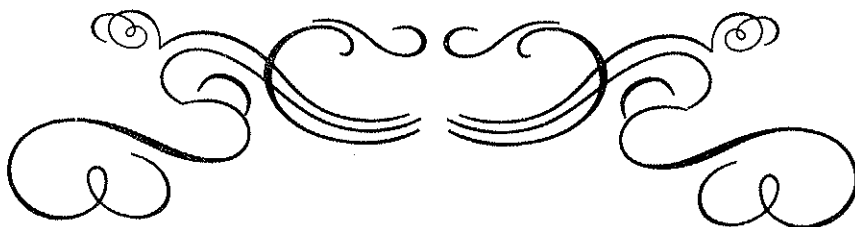
"I see." Kirk leaned back against the hard rocks. He was powerless to resist the Vulcan, but did not have to like the situation. And he was more than a little afraid of what such a violation of his own mind would entail.

But there was more. His voice, when he finally spoke, was quiet. "I would have liked to keep these memories, Spock."

The Vulcan closed his eyes, unwilling to admit that what he heard in Kirk's voice was true for him also. Swiftly he reached down to the Lieutenant's shoulder and administered the nerve grip. It took only a minute to erase the memory of their meeting; slightly longer to dispel the pain control he had imposed. At least whilst unconscious Kirk would be spared the worst of the returning discomfort. It was not a real joining of minds at all, just a surface contact, and still it disturbed him.

When it was done, Spock sat and watched the sleeping man until he heard footsteps and Human voices in the forest, wondering all the while at the cruelty of fate that had thrown him into the company of the first Human he had ever felt at ease with, only to separate them again. Not until he was sure that Kirk would be safe did he rise, and make his way quickly from the clearing and down the mountain. He walked carefully, his eyes automatically scanning the path ahead for obstacles or danger.

But in his mind, all he could see were the eyes of the man he had left behind and the friendship he had glimpsed in them, and his throat unaccountably constricted at the knowledge of what, in other circumstances, might have been.



JUST LIKE SIBERIA?

by

Sandy Catchick

Their week of leave was almost over. The planet Anthos had proved adequate for their requirements. The facilities were standard, the people humanoid and impartial, the climate moderate, the landscape one of low, rolling hills. Chekov was bored.

On impulse, Chekov entered a local shop, enticed by the sign above the door "Aircars for hire". He spent a short while discussing the advantages of a super deluxe model over the standard model, but with nothing much to spend his money on, was easily coaxed to splash out on the faster, plusher version. The salesman was so delighted that he threw in a map of the surrounding area without extra cost.

Chekov carefully checked the aircar for safety and was soon satisfied that the hire firm spent adequate funds on the maintenance of their vehicles.

Without further ado, he spread the map over the plush, green velvet seats, closed his eyes and stabbed a finger carelessly at the paper. He now knew exactly where he was heading. The location was at the far side of the low hills, below a much larger range of mountains.

The morning passed in relaxed enjoyment. It made a change for the navigator of a starship to be helmsman cum navigator of such a small craft, and he was enjoying pursuing an independent path of his own choosing.

By lunchtime Chekov had reached the mountains. They were spectacular. Well worth the journey. The majestic mountains offered snow-covered peaks to the pink of the local sky as though in homage. The young Russian landed the aircar and got out to stretch his legs. He walked for some ten minutes before coming across a tiny brook, with crystal clear water bubbling over granite rocks. Sighing contentedly, he chose a dry spot above the brook, sat down and took out his ration bar. It wasn't quite as good as stopping for a picnic, but since he hadn't had time to prepare, it was the best he could do. Before long Chekov closed his eyes and drifted into a contented sleep.

He was awakened by a powerful gust of wind that threatened to push him off his rocky haven. In the short time he had been asleep, the sky had changed from soft pink to harsh grey. Even as he noted this, the first flake of snow dropped silently onto the tip of his nose.

Chekov ran back to the aircar, beating his arms to keep warm. He was grateful that the hire company had provided him with wet

weather clothing as part of the deal. He donned the jacket and zipped it up.

How could such a moderate climate turn so quickly into a winter in Siberia?

Chekov tried the radio. He got nothing but static. It seemed likely that the storm was interfering with communications. Giving up, he settled himself in the pilot's seat and lifted the small craft into the air. He turned its nose back to Mindos City, the town he had left so peacefully that morning.

Gale force winds whipped the snow into a frenzy. The windscreen wipers were worse than useless, and Chekov put the little craft's lights on full force, attempting to penetrate the grey-white haze in front of him. He sat, hunched forward in concentration, gazing through slitted eyes at the restricted panorama.

Out of nowhere two red lights appeared directly in front of him. He throttled back the engine of his small hirecar, attempting to avoid a collision. The red lights drew away from him, and then were replaced by bright headlights, which swung round in an arc, dipped and vanished, leaving nothing but snow and sleet in their wake. Chekov inched his own craft forward. It seemed as though the other craft had gone into the raging river. Chekov shivered.

Command training took over and he gently eased his own aircar down onto the fresh, still falling snow and cut the engine. At ground level his headlights were almost useless in the driving snow and rain. With a few choice words in his native Russian he reached behind him for the overtrousers and boots provided. They seemed scant protection from this weather. Why was it always him who ended up in cold, wet rescues while other members of the bridge crew found Orion dancing girls, or mint juleps, or... Attempting to sate his sudden anger, he slammed the aircar door. He was denied even this satisfaction. The wind took the sound before it reached his hood-covered ears. He struggled to open the rear compartment, fighting the almost frozen mechanism, and finally won the battle and retrieved a torchlight, rope and shovel. Thoroughly prepared, he set out to find the other vehicle. No-one should be left to suffer in weather like this.

"Youch!" Breath was forced out of his lungs in the single, emphatic word. Eyes busy with searching the middle distance, Chekov was unaware how near he was to his target. He was brought up short against the roof of the other vehicle. It was an aircar, similar to his own, but definitely of the standard variety. Plush green velvet was replaced with hardwearing brown check. There wasn't even a radio inside.

In fact the aircar seemed empty. Chekov called out. The sound was whisked away by the storm. He listened. Silence. He looked. Nothing. No tracks. No bodies. Chekov shivered more violently - and it wasn't just with cold.

It was a difficult climb onto the upturned side of the aircar, but he was fit and had youth on his side. He lay flat and shone his torch into the aircar's interior. The windows had been smashed. The aircar was absolutely, definitely and totally abandoned. Caught in this precarious position, torch still focused on the aircar's interior, Chekov felt a heavy weight land on his back. He was pinned under his attacker. Helpless. The hairs on the back of his neck began to rise. He could feel the static electricity sending

shivers down his spine. Something cold and even wetter than the snow touched his ear. He closed his eyes and shoved a fist into his mouth to stop himself from screaming, reminding himself that he was a Starfleet officer and must act accordingly.

A hot breath warming the tip of his frozen nose caused him to blink. Large, soft brown eyes stared unblinkingly into his own. The dog looked very pleased to see him.

To say he was pleased to see the dog would be an understatement. Relief and understanding surged through his mind and body, leaving him weak and disorientated. "Good dog!" He spoke the words aloud. In his heart he knew he said them for his own benefit. If they brought comfort to his canine companion also, that was an added bonus.

The dog became ecstatic at these simple words. Its large tongue snaked out and licked his nose and face. Its tail wagged excitedly in time with the rhythm of the wind. Then it turned and leapt from the aircar. Chekov followed it, fearful of being left alone again in the face of the elements. One shock was quite enough for one day.

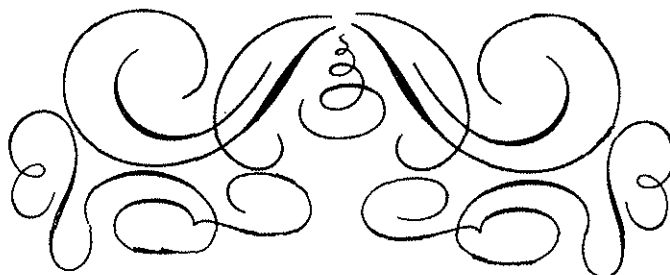
The dog led him unerringly into the darkness. The sound of the river grew. The ferocity of the storm seemed tame in comparison to the boiling, oil-coloured water. The dog stopped a few feet from the boiling cauldron and Chekov directed his torch at the river. As he watched a tree trunk sailed past, caught in the undercurrent, bobbing like a demented thing. No human being, or humanoid for that matter, could survive in such a malestrom. It reminded him of childhood illustrations from Russian folklore of characters from the underworld.

Chekov turned away, horrified, depressed. The wind laughed at him - at his puny efforts to find the occupant of the other aircar.

His foot caught in some tree roots and he fell. He was winded for a moment. Then it dawned on him that he had landed on something soft and warm. He shifted his weight, and the movement drew a soft moan from the body beneath him. The other pilot's eyes opened wide with a mixture of pain and surprise, and then with dawning joy. They were the most beautiful eyes Chekov had ever seen anywhere, including his native Russia. "Thank God Gale found you," said the girl.

Things were looking up. Chekov knew that this time it would be his shoreleave story that kept the Enterprise bridge crew listening attentively. After all, nothing ever happened on a boring planet like Anthos. His mind already darted ahead. "It was just like Siberia," he would begin. The question was, would they believe him?

Then he looked down into the deep green eyes below his, and for once he didn't care what they believed.



QUAL ES TV

by

Brenda Kelsey

McCoy tracked his way carefully across the dim observation deck, his only illumination the blue glory of Sha-Ka-Ree. Huddled by the window was a still form clad in the white tunic/trouser combination of an in-patient of sickbay. The whites matched his own clothing. He leaned on the old sailing ship wheel to steady himself, then slid down to sit with his back against the plaque.

"Qual es tu, Sybok?" he asked quietly.

The familiar figure stiffened, considered the question then answered in a familiar voice but with quite the wrong intonation.

"How did you know?"

"I know a lot about katras, and that sort of thing."

"The immortal aspect of Vulcanis is seldom discussed with outworlders. A few - like Amanda, I can understand - but you?"

"I'm a doctor. I received a katra into my keeping. At the time it was the logical thing to do. There was no-one else around who was in any fit state to take on the task."

"And you went to Mount Seleya." There was a wistful tone in the deep voice. McCoy hoped that it was homesickness.

"Eventually. We took the scenic route."

Sybok smiled reminiscently. "So you know about the Halls of the Ancients?"

"Enough. Spock said you grew up at Gol?"

"Yes. I lived there with my mother, until she died. Then I went to live in Sarek's House."

"So you know that you'd never be allowed to enter the Hall of the Ancients?"

Sybok stopped smiling. "Do I?"

"Of course. If the Guardians of the Halls didn't stop you at the door the Ancients would reject you. Your thought processes are not logical. Your presence would be too disruptive. You don't have a snowflake's chance in Hell of surviving there."

"You do know a great deal about Gol."

"Spent three months there." McCoy smiled. "I even got to like it. Not that I'd have stayed there one second longer by choice but I don't regret the time I did spend there. Master T'Sai, she taught me a lot."

That caught Sybok's attention. "Master T'Sai? Taught you?"

"Yeah."

"She would not." The tone held a lofty dismissal; a comfortable superiority.

"Oh, and why do you think that? A great deal has changed on Vulcan since you left to go chasing after Paradise."

Sybok shook his head. "No. Not that much."

"That's all you know. Times change, Sybok. And so do people. Even Vulcans. Your Daddy, now, he's done one heck of a good job. But then most of your Family are revolutionaries in one way or another. What else could be expected of the House of Surak? He was the first, and the best - wasn't he?"

"He was one of many minor lords, all sick of war and death," said Sybok dismissively.

"But his was the message that lasted. His words are those that have been remembered."

Sybok laughed, a grim sound that turned McCoy's spine to ice with memories of Henoch.

"IDIC. Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. A wonderful ideal. Just as wonderful, in its own way, as Sha-Ka-Ree. And just as empty and meaningless. I see in your eyes that you do not believe me, Doctor. Ah, but you should! I saw how those emotionally controlled, logical Vulcans, my people, treated Spock. He was an outcast. Almost totally isolated. He tried so hard to be what they wanted him to be. But they rejected him." The tone was stern and full of self-righteous indignation.

"Just like you did."

"I was his true friend."

Funny, thought McCoy as the enraged Vulcan actually shook a fist at him, how Spock's body doesn't look like Spock without Spock being inside it. Just like it wasn't Spock when we got to Seleya.

"You were not! You were every bit as selfish and callous as the rest of the Vulcan were. They taught him control and suppression and you taught him freedom and expression. Didn't you make him doubt the teaching of the Elders? Wasn't it you who made him examine their teachings instead of accepting them? If you hadn't, don't you think that he'd have stayed on Vulcan, safely teaching at the Academy, instead of being out here, racing round with a bunch of half-crazy aliens. And after you'd done all that damage, spoiled all the careful training, you abandoned him!"

"I did not."

"When you left Vulcan, when you were exiled, didn't he ask you to let him go along?"

Sybok's features clouded into a frown. "How did you know? Did he speak of this to you?"

McCoy leaned back against the wheel. "Not exactly. It's what

happened though, isn't it?"

"Yes. He did want to come with me. I did not feel it was right that he should. He was too... innocent, too easily swayed by... argument."

"You were going to say 'emotion' then. A strange logic, that. A man who preaches the rightness of emotion rejecting his brother's company because the poor sap turned out to be too emotional."

"I did what I thought was best for him."

McCoy nodded. "I can believe that. But what about now? Is this, what you're doing now, best for him? Where is Spock now?"

"He... sleeps."

"His choice, or yours?" challenged McCoy and Sybok couldn't meet the hot blue gaze. "I thought so. Still selfish. Still arrogant. How long will you keep him so? How long before somebody else realises?"

"Who else here would know of katra?"

"Kirk. Scott, Uhura, Chekov, Sulu. They were all at Mount Seleya. Most of the others will have read the logs, the reports. We weren't exactly inconspicuous when we took the scenic route. It's the reason why Klaa was so keen to try to kill Jim."

Sybok looked out at the Bird of Prey hanging against the brightness. "I do not understand."

"Well, if you hadn't been so busy being a Messiah on Nimbus III and had paid some attention to what your kid brother was getting up to, you'd know. Hell, everybody heard about us! Spock... died. Massive radiation burns." Pain at the still too raw memory trembled in McCoy's voice.

Sybok looked down at the body he had usurped, then at McCoy. "He lives!"

"He does now, but he died. It was his katra that I received. I was not a good choice, only a necessary one. I'm allergic to Vulcan Mind Melds, besides having, at the time, absolutely no idea what was going on and what was expected of me. Things got very confused for a while there. Spock tried to tell me, but all he managed to do was get us arrested. Jim and the others busted us out, then we recovered Spock's body. It had been regenerated, but it was empty of Spock because I was still playing with his marbles. So we went to Mount Seleya. Sarek requested Fal Tor Pan."

There was a lengthy silence as Sybok tried to digest the strange story. Finally he picked on the one fact that he could contradict. "Fal Tor Pan is a legend."

"T'Sai restored Spock. Had the Devil's own job getting us untangled. All she knew was the theory, she'd never tried it before. And neither of us were ideal subjects. Spock's dual heritage and my total humanity had got a bit mixed up. She couldn't figure out which bits of us were which. Which memories were mine and which his, and which were joint memories seen from individual viewpoints. I got to see most of Spock's memories, and he got to see most of mine."

"Then T'Sai could have ended your pain!"

"Why should she have?"

"Because it was so unnecessary!"

"That's precisely the reason that she didn't interfere, and neither did Spock. They knew that my feelings of guilt and shame were pointless, self-defeating and stupid. Telling me that wouldn't have helped me. They knew that until I'd got to the stage of development in my life where I could learn to accept those actions of mine as simply part of me, that any interference would be pointless, and ultimately harmful."

"Was I harmful to you?" For the first time a touch of doubt entered the earnest demeanour.

"Ultimately no, but while you were taking those memories apart, and afterwards until you died down there on Sha-Ka-Ree, everyone you melded with was not totally in touch with reality. It was as if they'd been tranquillised, taken aside from existence and allowed to reorganise themselves. That is not the sort of thing you should do to the crew of a starship. You nearly killed them."

"Killed them? How?"

"They weren't paying attention to their duties. They missed the warning signals about Klaa's approach. If he hadn't wanted Jim so badly he could have blasted Enterprise to its component atoms and we'd never have known anything about it. Fortunately, he didn't just want to destroy Jim, he wanted the glory of fighting Jim. So we all survived."

"You would have survived. You were on the planet."

"Yeah, with God. Who is not exactly the sort of being that I like making house calls to! Which brings us back to where this started. What do you intend to do now?"

"I... want to stay."

"With Spock? Not possible."

"You could not prevent it."

"T'Sai could."

"There is still so much to be accomplished," pleaded Sybok.
"On Nimbus III. I want to be there, to help."

"You've already done your share of work there. It's time to leave it to Talbot and Koord and Dar, and J'onn and the others who followed your dream. Leave it to your followers, as Surak did."

"I am not Surak."

"You're a revolutionary who was heard. Someone people believed in and trusted. You steal Spock's body now and everything you've done will be wasted. You think they'll want to remember being led by a vampire?"

"I would not steal from him. Borrow, for a while."

"How long is 'a while'? When that limit runs out and your work still isn't complete, what rationale will you use to justify an extension on your loan?"

"I would not."

"Sybok, I told you that T'Sai taught me a lot. You aren't the first person who's overwhelmed their host, and you won't be the last. You won't be any more successful than any of them were. Spock is too well known. He's too important. He's too needed here. They will catch up with you and force you out."

"Oblivion. Not a welcome prospect."

"An inevitable one for most of us. Now, without harming Spock - or later, with all that entails. Your choice."

"A choice that is no choice. I could not harm him."

"Nor he, you. That's why he let you overwhelm him."

"To go with dignity. I begin to understand you now. A very gentle, but very determined, knight. Tell him good-bye."

"I will. Good-bye, Sybok."

Spock's eyes closed and his head nodded forwards. McCoy moved to intercept the downward slump and supported the slack body until Spock gazed blearily at him.

"Doctor? I do not remember?"

"Sybok's gone, Spock," said McCoy gently. "He said for me to tell you good-bye."

"I could not oppose him," explained Spock simply.

"He knew that. That's part of the reason that he left."

"Part?"

"Yeah. Like you've always maintained, emotions are dangerous things. He found out that he loved you too, and that he couldn't harm you, no more than you could him. We'd better go back to sickbay."

"Doctor, I... "

"And you'll go to sleep and let the burns that the false god gave you have a chance to heal. Because later today, heaven help us, we have to attend a reception, for Klaa, and we have to be polite to a shipload of Klingons, and I'm tired and bruised and I'm getting too old for this sort of thing.

"You? Too old? Never." There was more than a hint of laughter in Spock's voice. "You'll still be out here, hopping galaxies, in fifty years' time."

"Now what kind of thing is *that* to say to a friend?"

